TWO CORONETS

MARY · AGNES · TINCKER

REFERENCE LIBRARY * HOUGHTON MIFFLIN CO. * BOSTON, MASS.
Archive
Collection

This book may not leave the Offices
and if borrowed must be returned within 7 days

TWO CORONETS

BY

MARY AGNES TINCKER

AUTHOR OF "SIGNOR MONALDINI'S NIECE," "BY THE TIBER," ETC.

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge
1890

Copyright, 1889,
By MARY AGNES TINCKER.

All rights reserved.

The Riverside Press, Cambridge, Mass., U. S. A.
Printed by H. O. Houghton & Company.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	1830	5
II.	Disappearance	9
III.	In the Year '34	29
IV.	Beatrice da Sanzio	44
V.	Stranded	51
VI.	Ten Years After	57
VII.	Southport	72
VIII.	A Fairy God-father	82
IX.	To Perry's	92
X.	In the Laurels	107
XI.	Sabbath Morning	128
XII.	The Deacon	141
XIII.	A White Rose	148
XIV.	A Flower-de-Luce	160
XV.	"Chains of Love Binding"	175
XVI.	Wedding-Cake	183
XVII.	A Smile	189
XVIII.	Home	206
XIX.	"Peep, Peep, Peep, Sweet"	218
XX.	Love and Glory	231
XXI.	Cinderella and the Prince	240
XXII.	Lizerann	260
XXIII.	A Snowstorm	266
XXIV.	Late Love	279
XXV.	Madama	297
XXVI.	Nina	310

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXVII.	Madame Elise	316
XXVIII.	Atalanta	327
XXIX.	A Lesson	341
XXX.	A Red Chair	351
XXXI.	Diana	362
XXXII.	The Chapel	368
XXXIII.	One Night	374
XXXIV.	"It Never Rains but it Pours"	386
XXXV.	Spirit-Flowers	400
XXXVI.	A Divorce	417
XXXVII.	Floating	432
XXXVIII.	Out of the Nest	440
XXXIX.	The Castellana	454
XL.	A Chapter of Letters	476
XLI.	An Indian Vase	487
XLII.	Cupid as Titan	507
XLIII.	The House-Angel	517

TWO CORONETS.

CHAPTER I.

1830.

From a tiny hamlet, an ancient *rocca*, perched on the top of an Italian mountain, two men were walking down toward a gray old town that encircled a softly rounded promontory at its base. They were men of the lowest class, and one of them was a *ciociaro*. He wore squares of leather laced on to his feet, soiled white cotton hose reaching to his knees, goat-skin breeches with the hair left on the front, and an old felt hat that had once been high-crowned, but was now in a state of collapse. He was a rather short, but powerfully built man, with a shaggy black beard, and equally shaggy black hair hanging down to a pair of eyes which were very bright, but had an unpleasant, furtive look. The teeth in his ugly mouth were beautifully white, but like those of a dog. His nose was large and flat. He walked with his body all slouched together, as one may see a cat, or a tiger, or any lithe springing creature, when at rest, obliterate its proper outlines, and sink or curl into soft and smooth-jointed shapelessness.

This man was Pietro Sopraciglia, his surname referring to the heavy eyebrows on which the ends of his hair rested. For short he was called Ciglia. He car-

ried a *canna* twice his own height, which he used as a cane.

His companion was of a more conventional appearance, though his toilet was much the same, excepting the sandals. He seemed tall because he was so thin; his anxious, starved look, lank hair and slightly stooping shoulders, giving him an appearance of age. Sisto Lo Zoppo he was called, though he was not lame; on the contrary, a pair of very elegant legs and feet had been thrown away upon him. His father had been lame; and the son, not having any personal peculiarity salient enough to hang a nickname on, had inherited the parental *sopranome* with the parental hat and cloak.

It was a bright spring morning, and the sun shone across a dewy plain, and kindled a multitude of crowding mountain-peaks. The town of Sanzio, seen from the upper heights, showed only a wide semicircle of slanting roofs. The path swung to and fro, so that the two men sometimes faced the sun, and sometimes turned their backs to it. A lark sang; but they were silent. Evidently something had been said which disquieted Lo Zoppo; he seemed nervous and doubtful. The other watched him furtively, and at length, after a long silence, repeated the last words he had uttered.

"Thirty *scudi!*" he said slowly, making the words sound so full and distinctly syllabled that poor Zoppo fancied he saw a roll of shining gold slip and slide as separate coin before his longing eyes. His face brightened at the vision, then clouded over again.

"The count's a good man," he said faintly.

"He said that you burned down his *capanna*," returned Ciglia, watching his companion's face with a sidelong gaze.

Lo Zoppo's brows suddenly contracted, and his eyes gave out a venomous flash such as one would not have expected from so weak a face. But the anger passed as quickly as it came.

"He didn't do anything about it," he said. "And he gave me a pair of shoes afterward. Good shoes, too."

Saying this, he looked down with complacent admiration at a pair of stout cow-hide shoes, as stiff as iron, in which his slender feet slipped about; and he took two or three very long steps in order to show them off better.

"He took your sister without leave or license," said Ciglia, scorning to look at the shoes so vauntingly brought into contrast with his *ciocie*. "And he left her in a month."

"Oh!" said Lo Zoppo, easily, "he found her a husband, and gave them his sheep to take care of."

"He might have married her, and given the sheep to you," said Ciglia.

The other gave a short, mirthless laugh, as though the proposition were too absurd to combat.

"She's no poorer nor lower than the girl he has married," urged Ciglia.

"Married!" exclaimed Lo Zoppo, stopping short, and staring at his companion. "Count Giorgini married!"

Ciglia nodded. "To the daughter of a washerwoman of Ombra," he said.

Lo Zoppo stood staring at the pebbly road before him, and taking in the full purport of this piece of news. He had never dreamed of Count Giorgini's marrying his sister. A nobleman marries in his own class. But to marry out of his class, to marry a girl no better than his shepherd's wife, after having abandoned her — that put a new face on the matter. Lo

Zoppo stood and let his wrath kindle over the thought of what might have been: a tenement, rent-free, for himself, his wife, and their three children; free entrance to the kitchen at Palazzo Giorgini (his vision did not soar to the drawing-room); the quiet, unreproved stealing from vineyard, orchard, cellar, field, and flock. Why, he might have lounged all the rest of his life!

Ciglia saw that the leaven was working, and left it undisturbed. In a green spot among the rocks beside the path grew a bunch of bright mountain pinks. He turned aside to gather them and fasten them into the band of his battered hat. Then they walked on again.

"It's thirty *scudi*," he said presently.

"*Già!*" said Lo Zoppo; and after a moment added: "How many *baiocchi* are there in thirty *scudi?*"

"Oh, thousands!" responded Ciglia, largely and vaguely. "You couldn't carry all the *baiocchi*. It's three hundred *paoli*."

Another studious silence. They were approaching the town.

"We'd better not be seen together," Ciglia said, finding that he could close the bargain. "I'll take this road off to the Osteria del Pino, and to-morrow morning at sunrise you can come there for coffee and a roll. I will pay. Come to the outside table near the hedge: nobody can hide by that. Start so as to come out of the gate just as the sun is rising. Take this *canna;* it will just reach; I've measured."

They stopped again, and Ciglia drew a closely folded letter from his pocket. He showed his companion how it might be fixed with a large pin to the end of the cane. Then, when he had seen the letter carefully fastened into an inner pocket of Lo Zoppo's breeches, they separated, each going his way.

CHAPTER II.

DISAPPEARANCE.

To say that Count Giorgini had married the daughter of a washerwoman was to employ the usual device of astute malignity, which selects an innocent fact as the foundation for an injurious falsehood. The girl's father, and his father before him, had been wealthy country people. Her mother brought her bridegroom two yokes of great white oxen, five hundred *scudi* in gold, a *vigna* producing pure *vernaccia* grapes of the best quality, an olive orchard of a hundred and fifty strong young trees, and a *rubbio* of wheat; not to mention three strings of pearls, every one of them as white as milk, two pairs of long gold ear-rings, as many gold rings as her eight fingers would hold, and a large case heavily weighted with closely packed household linen.

It does not concern us, the long miserable process by which they became poor, till at length the Sor Teresa Lanciani found herself a widow with one pretty daughter, two rooms in a small house at Ombra to live in, and no income besides the rent of the five other rooms the house contained. As this rent would not keep her from rags and starvation, she sought such light employment as she could get, and earned a decent living by knitting, sewing, making thread-lace, and sometimes doing up fine linen and embroideries for the *trousseau* of a bride, or other elegant toilet.

Among her best patrons was the family of Count

Alinori. They were not rich — were, indeed, poor, and growing poorer every year; but they still had land and credit; and if they could not pay in money, they paid in flour and oil, which was the same thing. The Alinori had, moreover, great expectations; for — after the present old Count Giorgini, who was a paralytic, and could not last long, his son Paulo, and a weak-minded younger son who need not be counted — they were next heirs to the large Giorgini estates, and to the title. The old Countess Alinori was the only sister of the paralytic Count Giorgini; and in that family the daughter inherited both estate and title when there was a failure of the direct male heir.

Paulo had married early, and his wife had died childless, after ten years of married life. The Alinori could then say that, in effect, there was but one life between them and fortune. Of course, they watched with jealous eyes all signs of any future marriage on the part of Count Paulo. They intimated that if the countess had given him an heir she would not have died, and they gave a great many mysterious hints *à propos* of her life and death.

We may as well say at once that all their hints and stories were false. Paulo Giorgini was no saint, nor even an ideal man; but he was not capable of murdering a wife because she did not give him an heir, nor for any other reason.

All this the Sor Teresa Lanciani had heard repeatedly; for the Alinori were like the flocks of the patriarchs in numbers, and they talked quite freely with their friends, and had a good deal of confidence in the Sor Teresa. On her part, she came to identify her interests so much with theirs that, little by little, she had learned to look upon the Giorgini as her own personal enemies.

And then the skies fell. For Paulo Giorgini came to Ombra, and seeing Beatrice Lanciani in the palace of his cousins, where she had come with her mother to bring some bobbin-lace of their own making, he fell irretrievably in love with her. Instead of returning to Sanzio the same day, he sent his carriage back, and lingered on, haunting the girl like her shadow.

In spite of jealous hatred, and though he had, according to them, poisoned his own wife, the Alinori had, of course, received their cousin with open arms. Passions may exist, even the most murderous ones; but they must wear the mantle of decorum. The family was virtuously shocked at Paulo's infatuation; for they had to own that he did love the girl *alla follia*. But after much whispering and taking advice of their counsellors, they appeared to forget all about the affair. It might have been so much worse: he might have married somebody!

Then, scarcely had they made each other understand that, though it would be a pity if the girl should come to harm, still her influence might prevent any serious entanglement, when the Sor Teresa came in great excitement to tell them that Count Paulo wished to make her daughter his wife.

And he did make her his wife in the midst of a chaos of gossip, slander, and violent opposition from both families, Alinori and Giorgini.

The wedding was very private, only the legal number of witnesses gathering in a little convent church at early dawn. There was a short journey, not meant as a wedding tour, but to procure a few days of peace before facing the Giorgini: then the couple went to Sanzio.

Paulo could not take his wife home, for the family had all declared that they would neither speak to, nor

sit at table with her; and the old count had even threatened to beat his new daughter-in-law if she should come within reach of his cane and the one arm which was not helpless. The bride and bridegroom therefore established themselves in a fag-end, poor-relations' corner of the palace, with a side-door opening on an obscure street; and there they began an independent housekeeping.

This was only a fortnight before the morning on which we have heard Ciglia announce the marriage to Lo Zoppo.

That night Count Paulo was more than usually wakeful. The separation from his family distressed him; and he was at once irritated and mortified by the style of his living "over a stable," as he described it with some exaggeration. He would not have proposed going into the place if he had not believed that, for pride's sake, if not for their own interests, his family would have shrunk from leaving the heir in such lodgings. It would have been easy for him to take an apartment, and live in a style befitting his station in life and his expectations, by incurring a debt to be paid on his legal accession to the title; and he would have had no scruple in doing so, had Count Giorgini been in good health: but a sentiment of filial piety prevented his speculating on the death of a father who might be said to be already half dead.

He lay awake, planning now one change, now another, and growing more nervous every moment. There was a sound at the window too, that annoyed him, as of a tree or vine moved by the breeze. At length it occurred to him that there was no tree nor vine near enough to touch the window-panes. He rose in bed, and listened attentively. The tapping was regular.

He got out of bed, and went to the window. The night was dark; but he could see a slender stick close to the glass, with a white spot at the end of it. After hesitating a moment, he opened the sash a few inches, and tapped on the stone outside with his finger-nail. The stick with the paper on it was pushed nearer. He detached the letter, rattled the sash a little to make the person below think that he had closed it, and waited to see what would happen.

All was silent for a moment. Then a stealthy step tore the long, tangled grasses, and he saw a darker shadow in the darkness, moving away under the trees.

"At least no answer is expected," muttered the count; and, softly closing the window, he went into an adjoining room to examine the paper.

As he read it, his face grew pale; and having finished, he began and read the letter through a second time, with increasing agitation. Then, the matter growing more serious as he dwelt upon it, he studied certain phrases of the document, comparing them with recollected circumstances, and with each other. Presently his hands began to tremble.

"I'm cold!" he muttered; and went noiselessly into the bed-chamber, and dressed himself, and came back to the *salon*.

The letter read thus: —

DEAR PAULO: I have found out something that alarms me on your account. Your political opinions are but too well known, and it seems that you have been talking too freely; or, what amounts to the same thing, some one says that you have. The Delegate is preparing to arrest you; and you know his dislike for you well enough to understand that you have little mercy to hope for at his hands. The fact that he has delayed, and is gathering all the informa-

tion he can to make a strong case, proves that the business is serious.

He counts on your family being angry enough with you not to make any opposition, and has already declared that Giovanni can marry and secure the succession in case yours should fail, or *any irregularity should be found in your marriage*. You see what he is aiming at. Fra David has already been severely reproved for having celebrated the marriage.

I advise you to get out of the way as soon as possible; and, relying on your consent, I have prepared everything for your escape. Your wife must stay a few days to cover your absence, and then follow you. Of course there will be no difficulty in her getting away.

It is fortunate that you and I look so much alike. You can use the passport I have taken out for myself, and I will remain shut up in my villa at Ombra (from which I write this) till I know that you are safe. I am even going about with my face tied up for an ague, which I will bestow on you as soon as you are ready to start. Don't think of money; I will lend you what you need; and I will see to sending your wife after you as soon as you shall be ready to receive her.

I advise you not to tell her where you are going, as it might leak out. She is a charming lady, but a little too rank, as well as too young, for political prudence. In fact, tell her as little as possible. Don't let her know that you are coming here; say that you are going in some other direction. She would be sure to throw herself at Monsignor Delegate's feet and confess everything, if your letter should be delayed twenty-four hours. It will be soon enough to tell her the whole story when you and she shall be having your honeymoon over again in Switzerland.

This is my plan: go to your chamber at the usual hour to-morrow night, and put out your light. When all is still, at about eleven o'clock, a man employed by me — a good fellow whom you know — will put a ladder up to your window, and you can get down that way. Be careful not to excite suspicion, for the Delegate's spies are watching you.

Another man will be waiting for you down at the Madonnina near the Osteria del Pino, and there will be a carriage in some safe place as close by as possible.

Do just as the men tell you. They are already examining the ground, and will keep close watch of everything till you are with them. *Be sure to bring with you all papers that may relate to your marriage*, even letters written to your wife; as, of course, the Delegate will have everything ransacked when he finds that you have escaped. I need not ask you to see that I am not implicated. Do not mention my name, even to your wife.

She must conceal your departure till she hears from me. I will give her your news as soon as you are off.

If you consent to follow all these directions just as I have written them, when you go out to the *piazza* to-morrow morning, manage to turn and look behind you for a moment, and as you look take a pinch of snuff. If you wish delay or to change anything, instead of taking snuff, take out your watch. But there is no time to lose.

Hoping to see you to-morrow night,

Yours affectionately,

LUIGI RANDINI.

Luigi Randini was a clever advocate of Rome, a schoolmate of Count Paulo's, and one of his best friends. He also was a Liberal, but of a reserved and prudent character. He was, moreover, well informed, and not likely to give an alarm for nothing. The case was therefore serious.

The count put out his candle, lest any glimmer of it should be seen through the shutters, and clasping his forehead in both hands, as he leaned on a table, tried to recollect or imagine what the Delegate could bring against him.

He had always been suspected as a Liberal, but something definite was necessary to an arrest. Only one circumstance seemed to him to offer any shadow of excuse.

According to the law, only a certain number of men could walk out together. Two were permitted to keep each other company; but three or four were supposed to be plotting, and they were always notified by the police to separate. Count Paulo recollected that, walking with a friend, just before his marriage, and when his engagement was in the full blaze of angry discussion, a second friend had joined them. This was one whose sympathy he had wished to enlist; and he was in the midst of eagerly stating his case to the two, when a policeman warned them that their number was *complotto.*

"There ought to be a plot to break up this petty tyranny!" the count had cried out.

The Delegate must have heard of this; and the Delegate was no friend of his. Still, it was scarcely enough to ruin a man of his rank.

"Some one has been talking to the Delegate," he muttered; and, even in speaking, a light burst upon his mind. "It is Leonardo Alinori!" he exclaimed.

For, besides the family interest of all the Alinori that he should not marry, his cousin Leonardo had a fierce personal interest against this marriage, which made him doubly an enemy. He was in love with Beatrice Lanciani. The count had learned this only after his wedding; and the information had astonished as well as angered him. Also, Leonardo, after being at first more violent, if possible, than the rest of his family in opposing the marriage, had at last done all he could secretly to help it on. It was he who had proposed the secret ceremony, and arranged the details of it; and he was one of the two witnesses.

Leonardo had explained this sudden change by saying that, since opposition was vain, he thought it wiser to make friends of his cousin and his cousin's

wife. He owned quite frankly, with his easy, half-cynical air, that he was thinking of himself as well as of them.

But when, after their marriage, the young countess confessed to her husband that the Signor Leonardo had pursued her for months, so that when left alone at home she always locked herself in, and did not open the door except to some trusty friend of her mother, the bridegroom took another view of his cousin's complacency. He had not, indeed, been able to free himself from the impression that it hid a sinister motive. He tried anew to divine it in the light of this letter, and in vain.

"But it is he!" he said with conviction. "And the whole tribe will help him to ruin me."

The next morning, when Count Paulo strolled down across the *piazza*, he stopped to give some orders to a workman, and, looking behind him to see a carriage that was passing, took a pinch of snuff. A few minutes later, meeting a friend, he stopped and went through with the same performance again.

"I have a cold," he said, "and just a little touch of fever."

The next morning his cold was so much worse that he concluded to stay in bed all day. The young countess took him some coffee and broth, and would not let the servant enter for anything. She reproached herself for having allowed her husband to walk so far the day before, when he was not well. For they had taken a long walk up the mountain road; and, seating themselves there, secure from eavesdroppers, had been observed to talk earnestly together for almost an hour.

In the evening the invalid was reported as better; but yet he did not appear, and still the countess would allow no one but herself to serve him.

The second morning, when the servant came in from doing her early marketing, her mistress told her that the count had gone down into the *campagna* on business.

"What! without his coffee?" exclaimed the girl in astonishment.

"Oh! he said that he could get a cup in the *piazza*," the countess replied carelessly. "He couldn't wait."

Business detained Count Paulo away from home that night; and the next day it was reported that he had gone to Rome. A letter came for him after a few days from that city. It was written by his friend, the advocate Randini.

"I received a letter from you a week ago, saying that you were coming here immediately," the advocate wrote. "I have looked for you every day in vain. What does it mean? I have wanted to come and see you and your *sposa*, but so far have been too busy to leave Rome this summer."

"Paulo couldn't have written such a letter a week ago," murmured the young countess on reading this. "And he told me that he should not go to Rome."

Her heart began to sink, she knew not why. She was yet too young and inexperienced to be alone. She would have sent for her mother; but aside from the objection that she might any day be summoned by her husband, it had been agreed that the Sor Teresa was not to visit her daughter. The Giorgini would have found even the temporary presence of the mother an added insult to their dignity. The Sor Teresa herself had been the first to perceive this, and to insist that her daughter should come to her, if they were to meet.

At the end of the first week, Fra Bernardo, a Capuchin monk, who had twice already knocked in vain at

her door, obtained admittance to the solitary bride. He had come, sent by the count's family, who were somewhat uneasy, to see what he could find out.

He found no more than he had heard in the *piazza*. The young wife, true to her husband's directions, told only what she chose.

People were talking, and the Giorgini insisted on knowing the truth. They sent Monsignor the Delegate himself to question Paulo's wife, to whom they would not speak. By this time Beatrice herself had become alarmed, and, weeping and trembling, she was partly persuaded, partly frightened, into confessing that her husband had been warned of some danger that threatened him on account of his liberal opinions, "though he is no more liberal than you are, Monsignor Delegato," she declared, and that he had gone away for a little while, but she did not know where.

"But this is nonsense, my child!" the Delegate said, and proposed to examine her husband's papers to see if any clew could be discovered to the mystery.

"We are afraid that Paulo may have been deceived," he said. "There is no accusation against him, and none meditated. It is some affair of the sects."

Monsignor made a very thorough search, not only of the count's papers, but of the whole house; and as she followed him helplessly about, the young woman obtained a great enlightenment as to how things may be hidden.

Nothing was found.

"He prepared for search before he went!" thought the Delegate. "It is a *complotto!*" And he hastened away to set his police at work.

Weeks passed, and no letter came, and no trace was found of the missing man. Months passed. His father died of rage and misery; his poor bride fainted

and faded; his mother searched wildly, following many an illusive trace, but never spoke to her son's wife, though she sent her regularly the allowance Paulo had received before his father died; and Beatrice remained in the house to which her husband had brought her. His mother began also to talk of finding a wife for Giovanni, with the Delegate's consent; at which all the Alinori rose up in arms, and formed a clerical party to influence the Pope against such a marriage.

For a while everything else was almost lost sight of in the battle over poor simple Giovanni: one party laboring to prove him intelligent, and another to prove him a fool. The Alinori, for instance, represented the old countess as standing over her son with a cane to cure him of an inconsequent laugh he sometimes indulged in, and they declared that the intelligent remarks he was reported to have made were prompted to him by some one behind a screen near which he was standing. Those who were not involved or very seriously inclined began to laugh; and Giovanni's sayings and doings became the jest of the town. "Gio-Gio," as he was called by these jesters, had little chance of finding a noble maiden to share his notoriety.

There were moments when his mother contemplated the possibility of accepting Paulo's wife. If the coming child should be a boy, she almost resolved to do so. "And even a girl would be better than the Alinori," she thought. "A girl inherits."

Then a new set of stories began to be buzzed about. Some hinted that Paulo had killed himself on discovering that his cousin Leonardo had been Beatrice's lover before he himself made her acquaintance. Closely upon that followed a whisper that Paulo and Beatrice were not really married.

At this the Sor Teresa rose like a lioness and brought her proofs "which everybody knows!" she said.

But when she went into battle, her heart withered within her. For the *frate* who had celebrated the marriage had gone to Africa as a missionary, and one of the two witnesses was dead, and the other was Leonardo Alinori.

"The woman is mistaken or mad!" said Leonardo. "I had nothing to do with any such marriage. Everybody knows that I opposed it from personal as well as family reasons. I had half a mind to marry the girl myself. They say that the marriage took place before it was fairly day. I would not get up at that hour to witness the marriage of a prince royal, and still less the marriage of a girl I love to a cousin I naturally hoped would have no heir."

When the Sor Teresa heard of this reply, the words she would have uttered died upon her lips. She stretched her arms upward, and lifted her haggard eyes to heaven in a silent appeal, which might have been a curse on the traitor.

There remained the record of marriages in the archives of the church. It was examined, but no record was found of the marriage of Paulo and Beatrice. To be sure, a leaf had been torn out and not so carefully but that traces of it remained; yet it might have had ink spilt upon it. Moreover, no other marriage was missing either before or after this; and if others had been re-copied, then the ink had been artfully diluted; for the writing did not look any fresher than it ought.

The Sor Teresa became dumb. She saw that it was useless for her to struggle.

But she had one hope yet. It seemed impossible that the Giorgini would not defend their own, and

prefer to adopt Paulo's child rather than see their possessions go to the Alinori.

Here was an opportunity for the Countess Giorgini to show herself worthy of the title of noblewoman, to give an example of courage, justice and mercy. She knew that it was in her power to have the missionary *frate* found: that the torn leaf in the records was a strong point in the case; and she knew that, lacking even these, she held in her own hands sufficient proofs of her son's marriage. She had the letter in which he first announced his intention of marrying the girl; and a second declaring his fixed resolution to do so, after he knew what opposition they would make; and she had a third, written after his marriage, in which he called Beatrice his wife. Victory was in her hands if she chose to do battle for the cause. She had an impulse to do right, but was delayed in action by a vice which called itself prudence.

"I will wait till the child is born," she said.

And meantime she hid the letters, which no one but herself had ever seen. Slyly, when her servants were busy, and she had locked the room above and the room below, that no one might overhear her and suspect what she was doing, she picked the mortar out from around one of the large bricks in her chapel floor, extracted the brick, put her three letters wrapped in cotton cloth and camphor into the cavity, replaced the brick with a bit of new mortar from some works in the garden, and laid a piece of carpet over. To these three letters she added a fourth paper, the result of an after-thought: —

"I, Emilia Giorgini, born Maccho, place my son's letters here on January 25th, 1831, with the intention of keeping them safely till I shall think best to acknowledge and receive the wife and child (as yet

unborn) of my son Paulo. I have no doubt that his marriage was a legal one; and I have no doubt that the Alinori are concerned in his disappearance."

"There is no knowing what might happen," she said, as she laid the declaration on the letters, and sealed them up. "Life is uncertain."

She scattered dust on the fresh mortar and laid the altar-rug over it. When her maid came in to sweep and clean the chapel, as she did once a week, she found the countess kneeling with her rosary before the altar.

"You might let it go this week, Giuseppina," she whispered. "I want you to take my bedroom curtains down."

Left alone, she softly locked the chapel door, drew away the carpet, and set her *scaldino* on the fresh mortar, touching it here and there with a bit of charcoal or ashes to discolor it like the rest of the floor.

On the first day of March the young Countess Beatrice gave birth to a daughter; and it was reported that the old countess, though she would not go to her, nor make any promise for the future, had yet provided carefully for her comfort. There was a good nurse, and the servant girl was allowed to ask for whatever she wanted at the palace while her mistress was sick.

The poor Sor Teresa never entered her daughter's apartment. "It might prevent their owning her," she said. "While she is there, there is hope; but if they send her away, she is lost!"

She crept very near, though, while her daughter was ill. She had walked all the way from Ombra, because if she had come by *diligenza* it would have been more observed; and at evening she had obtained admittance to the little kitchen garden and bit of

waste land under her daughter's window. She was rewarded by hearing the tiny wail of an infant, and by seeing one glimpse, before the shutters were closed, of an outline of the bed, with its pillows and a head resting on them, clearly drawn on the white curtain by the lamp beyond. In that fleeting glimpse the mother seemed to touch and wind around a finger of her outstretched hand the short curl that stood out on the shadowy forehead. She seemed to see the glossy blackness of them — those short, thick curves and waves that clustered heavily all about the low white forehead of her Beatrice.

Then, half in anguish and half in joy, she went away; and in the morning, having learned that her daughter was getting on well, she walked all the way back to Ombra, twenty-five miles.

The servant girl, Betta, had offered to smuggle her into the house at night, and let no one know; but she refused. She would not trust any one.

"The Alinori would be sure to find it out, even if Betta should not tell the Giorgini," she thought.

The Alinori certainly knew that she had been at Sanzio; and they saw that she came back with a hopeful face.

Leonardo had one more arrow, and that was tipped with poison. He let it fly.

"If the child looks like me, it is mine," he said. "If it does not, it may be Paulo's, and it may be mine."

The stroke was fatal. The young mother, scarcely out of bed when the story was imprudently brought to her, fell into it again, and died before they had begun to think her in danger. And the old countess's good impulses died also. She did not believe the story; but she doubted Beatrice.

Human nature, for all that charity and self-complacency may say about it, is for the most part rather pinchbeck gold; and excellent sentiments are, oftener than not, mere fine talk. The old Countess Giorgini was considered, and believed herself to be, a superior woman, firm, just and religious. Yet her conduct was weak, criminally unjust, and contrary to every precept of Christianity.

"Our family has never had a stain on it," she said, forgetting sundry little affairs that had been faced down or covered up within the memory of her generation; ignoring, too, the fact that she was herself fixing an indelible stain on the family honor. "I cannot accept the child. It would be imprudent. I must send them away; I will give them a pension; but they must go."

The shock of Beatrice's death frightened her a little, and she compounded with her conscience by permitting the faithful Betta to live on in that corner of the palace, and keep the child there, providing for their wants, but commanding that the little Beatrice should bear her nurse's name.

These proceedings perplexed the mother of the dead Beatrice. "The countess will accept the child," Sor Teresa said to herself. "She wouldn't keep her there at all if she did not mean to. If the babe should be like her mother, the old woman will not be able to resist her. I will not interfere."

And thereafter she lived her solitary life of tremulous hope and anguish.

When the babe was a year old, the countess found a wife for her son Giovanni — a poor gentlewoman nearly old enough to be the young man's mother. The marriage was confessedly for no other reason than that the weak heir might have some one to

protect and take care of him when his mother should no longer be there; for only a wife would have the will to do that. Giovanni, who had many amiable qualities, was too trusting and inclined to make confidants of his servants; and there was no one of them that the Alinori could not buy.

Madamigella Maria Tentini was born of a line of counts whose poverty — considering their rank — was phenomenal. If they had been able to give her a "portion," or if she had been pretty and interesting enough to make any one else wish to supply the defect, she would have entered a convent. She was severe, virtuous and a bigot; and she accepted the post of nominal wife to the rich simpleton, as she would have accepted the title of abbess, simply as a religious dignity and a holy responsibility. She meant to do right, and as far as a cold-hearted, narrow-minded person is capable of doing right, she did. She proved an efficient housekeeper, and her pious habits suited the countess better, in fact, than they suited Giovanni, who complained that she watched over him too much. She listened in impassive silence to his complaints, and continued her supervision. She was one of those persons who, if they take the notion that it is their duty to torment you to death, will proceed to do so in spite of argument or entreaty, and will see your last struggles without a twinge of remorse.

As time passed on, Madama Maria began to watch the countess a little, too. She found that the old lady liked to be at the window when Betta took little Beatrice out for her afternoon walk; and that when Betta came to the palace, she always carried some sweets or trinkets away. The child was never brought in under the *portone*, nor even suffered to stop in the street before the palace windows; but there were stairs and

corridors within, leading to the remote apartment to which Count Paulo had taken his wife; and more than once the younger countess had suspected her mother-in-law of going through them to visit the child. She would disappear from time to time, and be invisible occasionally for an hour, yet never volunteer any account of her absences. And she always came back thoughtful, with a sighing tenderness about her, and sometimes with traces of tears around her dim eyes.

Madama Maria never questioned her, but she suggested questions, which were, however, never answered. The old countess would look at her with a certain intent, calm dignity which indicated that she was still the mistress of her own actions; and that look was a sufficient check. But the presence of this child was a heartsore to the daughter-in-law. She considered it a scandal. To her, every evil story told about poor Beatrice Lanciani was true.

The old countess began to fail; and as she failed, she grew troubled. There was evidently something on her mind. She sent for her confessor, and had a long conversation with him one day when little Beatrice was between three and four years old. The duty which she had neglected had become harder to do with every month of delay, while she had grown weaker: and though she doubtless meant to make a death-bed reparation, she was still ashamed of and alarmed at her own cowardice.

Her confessor was more timid than herself, and could only advise her to wait.

The night after his visit the old countess was taken violently ill; and she died before morning, having been almost speechless from the moment of her seizure. She was in great mental distress, and made an

effort to say something to her daughter-in-law, of which only two words were distinguishable.

"The chapel! the chapel!" she whispered wildly.

"Oh, yes! we will have masses said," Madama Maria promised her eagerly, striving to soothe and understand her, and praying at the same time.

The sick woman shook her head, and tried in vain to explain herself. When the priest came, she was speechless; and she died without having expressed her wishes.

Madama Maria became mistress of the Giorgini fortunes, and administered them well. Perhaps poor Giovanni was not quite so happy as he had been while his mother was living. But he was well guarded, and it would have been a cunning person who could have got speech of him unseen by the many watchful eyes that never left him day nor night. His health was anxiously watched over, his acquaintances chosen for him; he was amused and petted like a child, and taught to avoid an Alinori as he would the plague.

When a decorous three months had elapsed after the death of the old countess, her son's wife informed Betta that she and her charge must leave Palazzo Giorgini, and that after a month their allowance would be stopped.

"But she is Count Paulo's daughter, Madama," said the woman indignantly. "And the countess would never have sent her away."

"There are others who know better than you," said the lady with an air of severe and implacable virtue. "It is useless to talk about it. I have given you three months' time and a month's allowance. I shall do no more. Her staying here is a scandal. If she is not the mistress of everything, then she has no right here at all. I must do my duty."

CHAPTER III.

IN THE YEAR '34.

In the *piazza* of Sanzio, on a pleasant morning in June, a party of American travellers stood waiting till it should please their *vetturini* to be ready for a start. Their two carriages had been there in apparent travelling order a full half-hour. Mrs. Nelson, the chaperon of the party, believed that they had been waiting for her; but after descending with great dignity to take her place she was somewhat mortified to find that she had still another fifteen minutes to wait. The drivers were abroad in search of hay, ropes, commissions and the inevitable little keg.

The party consisted of two ladies and three gentlemen, all young and unmarried except Mrs. Nelson, who was a widow of forty-five.

The *piazza* where they stood was the social, religious and business centre of the town. One side was occupied by the cathedral, a commonplace structure with a fairly good campanile. At another side was the theological seminary, with a fine, picturesque façade of blackened stones, the greater part of them remains of a pagan temple.

The third and fourth sides of the *piazza* were occupied by shops with dwelling-houses over them. A beautiful fountain rose in the corner where the cathedral joined the seminary. Opposite was the chief café of the town; and some of the chief men were seated at little tables outside, each provided with a cup of coffee, and some with a newspaper.

It was a pleasant, leisurely, almost an Arcadian scene.

Half a dozen women and girls were at the fountain, filling the large earthen *conche*, which, poised on a twisted piece of cloth, they carry on their heads. The water overflowed from these vases while their owners paused to look at the *forestieri*. The gentlemen at the café looked at them also over the rims of their cups and the edges of their papers. There were suspicious movements and glimpses behind the half-closed blinds of the seminary, whence students and reverend professors peeped, decorously invisible; and there were heads indicating curiosity in the frankly opened windows of secular buildings, and full-length observers in the shop doors and about the *piazza*. In short, our travellers were looked at in every sort of way, from the instantaneous firefly lamp flashing through the lashes of the blushing maiden, to the full stare of unabashed rusticity.

The canons, coming out of the cathedral after their office was over, lingered about to watch the imminent departure, excepting only the *canonico priore*, who promptly went to the fountain-head for information. Climbing to the apartment of the Sor Pollastri, who kept an inn over the *pizzicaria*, he asked to see the visitors' book; and putting on his spectacles, read out as follows: "Meesees Nalesony, Mees Martiny, Yahmasy Martiny, Carlase Saleviny, Frahnches Ailderry;" which, in English, meant Mrs. Nelson, Miss Martin, James Martin, Charles Selwyn, Francis Elder.

The "U. S. A." with which they had largely designated their place of birth, was a puzzle to the reverend gentleman; but the Sor Pollastri informed him that the travellers were from the United States of America, wherever that was. "*Chi lo sa?*"

Oh! the *canonico priore* knew perfectly where that was. Had not an uncle of his, a capuchin, been for twenty years a missionary there among the savages of Brazil? Their country was discovered by Cristoforo Colombo, and —

But here the Pollastri, who preferred talking to listening, interrupted the stream of history, and told her own story.

Mrs. Nelson, the potatoes-and-butter-colored woman in black, was a childless widow, and had been living in Paris several years. She was an old friend and school-fellow of Mrs. Martin, the mother of the young lady and of the *bel giovanotto* with the serious face. The other two young men were not related to her, though they were of the same color. The little fellow who looked like a girl, Mr. Selwyn, had been sick in America, and was travelling for his health. The whole Selwyn family were to have come; but on the eve of setting out the young man's father fell and broke his leg, and Mrs. and Miss Selwyn had remained to nurse him. He and the young Martins, who were to be of the party, would have been obliged to postpone their journey, if Mrs. Nelson had not written them from Paris that she would take charge of them the minute they should arrive at Havre. At the last moment, Mr. Elder had begged leave to join them. This was the other small light-colored young man with the sharp blue eyes. Nothing potatoes-and-butter about him. He was a lawyer.

While her party was being described upstairs, Mrs. Nelson was becoming impatient below.

"Do help me into the carriage, James!" she said, "and, Bessie dear, don't let that old woman touch your dress. Those clear grays show a soil so easily."

James Martin helped the lady to her place, and returned to his contemplation of the scene. He was a robust young man of twenty, with dark eyes and a strong, studious face. But, to borrow a distinction from William Blake, he looked *through* his eyes quite as much as *with* them. His glance was large and sympathetic.

Mr. Francis Elder had quite another expression. His eyes picked up facts as a bird pecks up seeds. He had come to see Europe; and he accomplished his purpose with as few weak scruples as possible. He gazed at the houses, the church, the shops and the café. He poked his cane between stones, and put on his glasses to find out that the grand altar of the cathedral was made of imitation marble. He examined with a perfect composure the faces of the people, their forms, hats, coats, shoes and bare feet. He looked critically at all they wore, were and did. He paused to listen to their talk, though he could understand but little of it. He glanced at the newspapers in their hands, the coffee in their cups. He noted that they all read the same newspaper, and all drank black coffee.

Mr. Elder was a small, blond young man, with a thin face, a hard jaw, and a rather large aquiline nose. This journey of his was to give the finishing touch to his education, before he should settle down to the practice of his profession.

Mr. Selwyn was not a particularly striking youth; but he was winning and gentlemanly. He liked to visit "nice" places, and shrank with a somewhat excessive fastidiousness from the filthy picturesque.

Miss Elizabeth Martin was a very pretty girl. She and her brother were the younger ones of a numerous family, of which all were married but themselves;

and their father was the chief medical doctor of their native city of Southport.

The *vetturini* appeared at length, each with a bundle of hay, which he tucked away under his box. The one who drove Mrs. Nelson's carriage was accompanied by a young woman with a child in her arms. She talked earnestly to the *vetturino* as they approached; and, when the hay was bestowed, he went to the carriage-side with her.

The young woman, who was very neat and well dressed, looked up at Mrs. Nelson and assumed a deprecating smile. The *vetturino* also assumed a deprecating air, and spread his hands out with a gesture that was at once helpless and magnanimous. Then the man began to talk, and the woman to interrupt him with observations, confirmations, ejaculations, and apologies. They explained, implored, exhorted, complimented and implored again, now one, now the other, now both together.

And this was the meaning of the scene: Here was a little child — a *contessina*, interpolated the woman, who must go to her grandmother, at Ombra, precisely the city for which their excellencies were setting out, and where they would arrive in four hours, after what Betta hoped would be a happy drive for them. Betta had meant to take the child there herself in the *diligenza;* but unfortunately there was no *diligenza* that day. Betta could walk, with the hope of being helped on her way by some passing car; but there was no way of getting this little angel there, unless — (pantomime). Bice would not give them the least trouble in the world, "*N'è ve', Bicettuccia?*" The *vetturino* knew the child's grandmother, "*tanta buona donna,*" and would himself consign Bice to her, if their excellencies — (pantomime).

"All we want is an orchestra and a drop-curtain," remarked Mrs. Nelson. "We have the scene and the spectators."

In fact, every one about the *piazza* seemed to take an extraordinary interest in the discussion. The men at the café laid down their newspapers, the canons ceased their talking, and stared unreservedly, and the seminary blinds became intensely motionless. The girls at the fountain hastened to set the tall vases of water on their heads, and drew near. All looked at the beautiful child held in her nurse's arms.

"There is nothing to prevent our taking her," Miss Martin said. "She is very pretty and well dressed."

The *vetturino* struck in to say that he should charge them nothing extra for the child, though in such warm weather the horses felt every additional pound of weight. He made this declaration with such an air of generosity that Mrs. Nelson immediately fell into a slough of moral and arithmetical confusion. She had hired these men, with their horses and carriages, ropes, bells, bundles of hay, and all their appurtenances, for so much a day, and they had no right to take even a basket of eggs that did not belong to the party. She pressed her finger to her forehead.

"Bessie," she said, "are we asking him, or is he asking us, to take this child?"

Miss Martin had held out her arms to the little girl, and the nurse had given her up, and stood looking at her with tearful eyes. "Be good, *carina*," she said fondly; "and Betta will come to you soon."

Mr. Elder, having finished his tour of the *piazza*, came now to inquire what they were going to do with the little beggar.

"Adopt her," replied Miss Elizabeth Martin. "Isn't she pretty?"

"Very!" said the young man, with an admiring glance at the two. And the young girl with the child in her arms certainly made a charming picture.

A hand was stretched out behind the carriage, where stood a group of men and boys who had brought the baggage downstairs, or performed some other trifling service. The hand held a fresh fig on a grape-leaf. "Give it to her, Betta," said the owner.

"Oh! thank you, Lo Zoppo!" said Betta, and she gave the fig to her nursling, who received it, and sat hushed and motionless with it on her knee.

She seemed to be a reserved child, and either had great self-control, or was very timid. She looked fixedly at her nurse, with bright, dark eyes, and breathed quickly, but betrayed no other sign of emotion.

"Does she like it?" asked Lo Zoppo of Betta, as she stepped back to let Mr. Elder get into the carriage. He looked at the woman, but not at the child.

"Oh, yes, ever so much," responded Betta absently.

Beatrice rose and looked about in search of her nurse, something of affright coming into her beautiful eyes. Seeing her, she stretched her arms out quickly, dropping the leaf to the ground.

Lo Zoppo gathered up the fig, and turned away.

All was ready. The two younger men mounted into the second carriage, already encumbered with a multitudinous small baggage. There was an outcry of encouragement from the nurse to the child, a cracking of whips, a jingling of bells, a general sensation and vague lifting of hats about the *piazza;* and the party were off.

That is to say, they thought they were off; but at the gate there was another halt for some mysterious reason; and here the nurse overtook them. Tears

were running down her cheeks; and at the sight of them the child trembled, and restrained a faint whimpering sob.

Nothing is more pathetic than the self-control of a suffering child; it is so suggestive of orphanage, or ill-treatment. Mrs. Nelson began to caress and pity the little girl. "I almost wish we could take the nurse along with the driver," she whispered to Elizabeth Martin. "I wonder if he would have room for her in among the boxes? Or she might sit with us, on the front seat. I would like to ask her some questions."

The nurse understood her glances, if not her words, and clasped her hands in an ecstasy of grateful entreaty. Mr. Elder was demanding explanations of their delay from the driver.

Lo Zoppo had reached the gate before them, and again stood behind the carriage. He held a beautiful red rose. "Give it to her," he said, stretching out his hand to Betta.

Betta gave the child the rose.

"Does she take it?" asked Lo Zoppo, looking at Betta.

"Yes," she answered. "Thank good Zoppo for the beautiful rose, Bice, dear!"

He did not wait for thanks, but turned abruptly away.

"Oh, Madama, if you would!" begged the nurse, clasping her hands. "I may have to walk all the way. I will myself hold the *contessina* so that she need not trouble you. It would be such a charity!"

"Oh, take her right in!" cried the young lawyer grandly. He had not heard Mrs. Nelson's proposition. "Call the rest of the family. Perhaps the grandfather is here in some hole or corner, all ready

to pop out in his turn. Bring the little dirty white dog along, too. He can sit up on the back seat, and bark as much as he wants to. Don't be bashful! Speak right up!"

Betta did not understand the words; but the large hospitality of the young man's gestures required no interpretation. She smiled brilliantly upon him, showing her white teeth.

"If you could make room for her there, Mr. Elder," Mrs. Nelson said calmly, "the child would be better contented. And I would like to know who they are. There is something interesting in both. I don't know but that you would be more comfortable in the other carriage."

The young lawyer made a movement expressive of sudden collapse, descending with great promptitude from the carriage, and, holding his hat in one hand, offered his other to assist Betta, who beamingly mounted to his place.

This time they were really off; and when the fact was established, everybody's note-book came out. All but Mrs. Nelson carried plethoric little memorandum-books, with lead-pencils laced through tiny straps in the covers.

If one had looked over Mr. Elder's shoulder as he wrote, it would have been seen that only two words followed the name of the town where they had slept, and the date: "Bessie. Brat."

Not one of the company but would have stared on reading this entry; for there was no such intimacy between the gentleman and his fair travelling companion as the "Bessie" would have implied. They were both from the same town; but he was a newcomer there, and their real acquaintance might have been said to date from the beginning of their journey,

a month before. He had only of late begun to slip from the ceremonious "Miss Martin" to an occasional "Miss Elizabeth."

"And now, tell us about the child," Mrs. Nelson said. She spoke Italian fairly well, and was rather proud of the accomplishment.

We already know the nurse's story, and a great deal besides.

She told how her own mother had been Count Paulo's nurse, for which reason the count had sent for her to stay with his young wife, as servant and companion. She wept in praising the hapless bride, who was, she declared, without a fault, an angel upon earth, and devotedly attached to her husband, as he was to her.

In speaking of his disappearance, she became more reserved, telling the story chiefly in a pantomime of shrugs, grimaces, and gestures of the hand; and when urged to say what she thought, declared that she thought nothing because she knew nothing. The name of the Alinori never passed her lips. "The countess died of grief for her husband," she said.

But in speaking of the Countess Maria, Giovanni's wife, the nurse showed no reserve whatever. "She is a bad woman!" she exclaimed. "She knew well that the old countess must have believed in the Signor Paulo's wife, but didn't wish to say so at once, and would never have sent away the *bambina*. The old countess adored the child, and used to come to see her every night after she had gone to bed. She would sit and cry, and talk of the Signor Paulo, and say that Bice looked just as he did at her age. She came slyly; for that wife of Giovanni's watched her as a cat watches a mouse. The old countess got enough

of her; and I am sure she half repented having procured the marriage. But she said that she could not leave Giovanni alone in the world. There is no knowing what might have happened to him. Well, the old hag is mistress now, and she has turned us out. And yet she dares to say her prayers, and puts on all the airs of a *bizzocca*."

Betta used the people's pronunciation of the hard word *bigotta*.

"And now, instead of being mistress of the palace and all her father's lands," resumed Betta, her eyes flashing at the child through their tears, "she has nothing but that," pointing to a bundle tied up in a handkerchief. "And every cent she has in the world is contained in this box."

She untied the bundle of child's clothes, and took out a tin money-box. It was rather large, and so constructed that no money could be taken out without destroying the box. It was already heavy; but the two ladies took out their purses at once, and each added a silver piece to the store.

"The old countess gave it to her, and put in all the money," Betta said. "She used to put something in every week. She said it must be given to the Sor Teresa, the child's other grandmother. I suppose there may be some copper; but I am sure there must be silver, too. To think," she exclaimed, looking at the child, after having put the money-box into the bundle again, "to think that she is a poor child, and has to beg a ride from strangers, when she ought to be rich, and drive out in a carriage with two horses of her own! Why, signora, she is a countess in her own right, or will be when Giovanni dies; and if she married a man without a title, her son would be count all the same."

Mrs. Nelson took the little girl on her knees, and began to caress her.

"Can't we do anything about it?" asked Elizabeth Martin, interested and indignant.

"*Dio benedetto!*" said Betta. "What could you do?"

This story had been told with occasional interruptions from the young men in the other carriage, especially from Mr. Elder, who wished to revenge his banishment from the ladies' society. From time to time, as the road allowed, they had driven near enough to fire some small conversational shot into the leading carriage. Now it was an old man, precisely the grandfather the lawyer had predicted, whom he heard calling after Mrs. Nelson to take him in. The poor fellow was waiting, just around the last turn, exhausted with age and running, and wished her to come back for him. Then he had discovered that the nurse was a government spy, and entreated them not to express any political opinions in her hearing, nor, in fact, any opinions at all. And a moment after, the second carriage came tearing along in a cloud of dust, bearing the startling verbal dispatch that Betta was a *carbonara*, whose company would compromise them fatally, and that they would probably all be detained for examination at the next town, even if they escaped imprisonment.

All these announcements having been received with dignified composure, Mr. Elder presently left them to their fate.

"I have all I can do to balance myself on your coffee-pot," he moaned. "It is far from being a good cushion, though it is pretty well wrapped up. I have sat on it all the way."

"You haven't broken my coffee-pot!" cried Mrs. Nelson.

"No; your coffee-pot has broken me. That is, I am not aware that it is broken."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Nelson anxiously to Bessie. "Do you suppose he really has sat on it? I wouldn't lose that coffee-pot for the world!"

"There may be a few bottles broken," said a mild voice from the other carriage, now alongside their own in a widening of the way. "I smell something like a mingled odor of brandy, alcohol, and Marsala; and the little blue bag has a brown spot on it."

Mrs. Nelson uttered a faint scream.

"Don't believe him!" said Miss Elizabeth. "I never believe any of his stories;" and the look of smiling scorn she bestowed on the gentleman might have gone far to justify the "Bessie" of the note-book. "But I suppose he is uncomfortable in the midst of all that baggage," she added in a lower tone, and blushing slightly.

Mrs. Nelson called a halt, and ordered the young lawyer to come and take the seat opposite her, where she could save him the trouble of straining his voice when he wished to speak to her. "Bessie might do worse," she thought.

The two young men left in the other carriage drove on for some time in silence, the one occupied with the scene about him, and the other with his own thoughts.

"I have been thinking, Charlie," said James Martin at length, "that beasts may be to a man what colors on a palette are to a picture: dabs of qualities out of which human characters are to be composed. Those donkeys, now, are pure endurance; the pigs, unmixed obstinacy; and the pigeons, gentle affection."

"Mother says she had a fight with a pigeon once," said Selwyn. "It was in an old palace, full of holes, in some old Italian *paese*, I've forgotten where. The

pigeons wanted to build their nests or lay their eggs in some holes in the wall, outside the windows, and their cooing annoyed her. She tied a handkerchief on a cane, and tried to drive them away. They resisted, and charged at her handkerchief. I've forgotten which side won; but there was a battle."

"I am sure that the pigeons beat," said James Martin, looking at the gentle, languid face beside him.

"I have been thinking, Martin," said Selwyn, "if you will excuse my changing the subject, that, after all, I will be a doctor. Would there be room for us both in Southport? You might give me the hypochondriacs. I don't believe that you would have patience with them."

"Take them and welcome!" replied the other cordially. "But what has made you change your mind?"

"It is watching and listening to Elder. For weeks I have been asking myself what I should do if I had to sustain a case against him. All our pretended contentions and arguments were meant by me as practice, and he has always beaten me. If he couldn't do it seriously, he has done it with a laugh: if he did not find an honest way, he played me a trick. He has a thousand turns and twists. You never know just where he will bring up, except that he is sure to be on his feet. Why, sir, I have seen him eat humble-pie in a way that really, you know, you couldn't do yourself; and just as you were turning away in disgust, up he comes like a steel spring. Now, there's nothing of that sort in me. I don't know of any legal business that I should be equal to except the drawing-up of wills, and reading them out after the funeral. Yet I should feel as if I were a sort of sexton if I had much of that to do."

"You might draw up marriage settlements instead," his friend suggested.

"That would be very pleasant writing," he owned. "But, unfortunately, we have no marriage settlements to draw up. Don't you think that I would be a good doctor?"

There was a graceful, almost feminine archness in the air with which this question was put, and an affectionate smile answered it.

"The women will all fall in love with you, Charlie. I prophesy that you will be the fashion, and I shall come in only for surgical cases and consultations."

"You really think I may succeed, James? Honor bright?"

"Honor bright, Charlie!"

The two shook hands.

CHAPTER IV.

BEATRICE DA SANZIO.

It was a charming drive over the road between Sanzio and Ombra, and our travellers had perfect weather. The sun shone, but with a certain courtesy. In the air there was something silken and silvery, now disappearing, now delicately visible. It came from a cloud stranded on a near mountain-top, all torn black mists where it hung lowering on the rocks, but an ineffably thin veil where it floated away, and melted into the gold and blue of sun and air. Now and then a denser fragment detached itself, grew into a snow-white individual cloud, and rose into the pure ether, like a saint out of the mass of humanity.

The breeze was as fragmentary as the mists: a light flutter one moment, a sudden waft of freshness the next, then a perfect stillness, warm and heavily sweet with the perfume of elder-blossoms. The elder-trees that lined the road at either side were going out of blossom; but there was such a multitude of them, that the few remaining bouquets they each bore were enough to scent the atmosphere. In their full blossoming time the air about the trees had been overladen with their rich breath.

At mid-day our travellers arrived at Ombra. It was a smaller Sanzio. Church, *piazza*, fountain, café, — they were the same, but a little duller. People sat still in Ombra and wondered why somebody didn't do

something. There was very little business and still less enterprise in the town; and the inhabitants seemed sunken in a lethargy of mingled contentment and *ennui.*

As the travellers approached the gate, little Beatrice, protected by Miss Martin's arm, leaned over the side of the carriage and looked up at the walls veiled with blossoming caper vines.

"Do you know that this is your home, dear?" the young lady asked. "I am sorry to lose you, though you have not once kissed me."

The child turned, looked earnestly at the speaker for an instant, then, dropping her glance, melted slowly nearer to her, softly stole a small arm around her neck, leaned, a light weight, against her shoulder; and, having thus reached the position for a kiss, was overcome by shyness, and. instead of lifting her mouth, let her head droop till her smooth white brow and crushed chestnut curls touched and pressed the girl's cheek.

"Isn't she fascinating!" cried Miss Martin, and kissed her face and neck enthusiastically.

"She will be a fine coquette one of these days," remarked the lawyer.

Just within the gate was a *piazza*, with a group of mulberry trees standing before a church and convent. There were men in some of the trees stripping off the leaves to feed silk-worms. Under the thicker shade an old woman was doubling and twisting gray flaxen thread, her pegs set in the green turf. The melancholy of grief long endured hung over features which must have once been beautiful. The snow-white hair still rose in thick waves above a wide brow, the faded eyes were finely shaped, and the sunken mouth had a short upper lip.

At sight of her the *vetturino* drew in his horses, and called out: "Sor Teresa!"

She stopped winding, dropped her ball of thread on the grass, and approached the carriage.

Some impulse of thoughtless mischief made Elizabeth Martin hide the child, and nod a quick sign to the nurse.

A light blush covered the old woman's face as she approached. She felt the instinctive alarm of one who has suffered many shocks, and the instinctive subjection of one educated to a great respect for social superiors. She courtesied to the ladies when she saw them looking at her, and glanced inquiringly at the driver.

Mrs. Nelson beckoned to her. "Were you expecting a child from Sanzio?" she asked.

The old woman's face immediately became agitated. An expression of terror filled her eyes.

"What does she look like?" Elizabeth Martin struck in, softly pushing down a little head that began to lift itself from her knee.

"I — I do not know, Signorina," the Sor Teresa stammered, red with excitement. "I have never seen her. Her mother" — she choked, and ceased speaking.

"Do you think that she would look like this?" the girl pursued, lifting her young charge into sight.

The child appeared like a shower-freshened rose, her face flushed, and her hair disordered by the momentary confinement.

Villemain describes the true ode as "*l'émotion d'une âme ébranlée et frémissante comme les chordes d'une lyre.*" The soul of such an ode flashed into existence as that desolate old woman saw for the first time the only living creature of her blood left upon the earth,

the child whose existence had been to her a mixture of intolerable anguish and piercing hope.

There was a start, a faint cry, and she stood staring at the lovely apparition, her arms stretched out, trembling, but tense. Every nerve of her being responded to that sudden vision. And not alone her present and her later past felt the shock. That small, bright face, alive with the fresh fire of youth, kindled a spark that ran back through all the ashes of her past, and confounded her own and her daughter's childhood with this childhood that she saw.

Startled by the old woman's strange agitation, Elizabeth Martin remained motionless; and there was a pause during which no one spoke.

Then James Martin descended hastily from his carriage, took the child and gave her into her grandmother's arms.

"You should know better than to play such a trick, Elizabeth," he said, almost angrily. "Can't you see that it is no time for trifling?"

The touch of that little form loosened the strain. The Sor Teresa clasped her grandchild, and broke into loud and convulsive weeping.

"Let's get out of this!" muttered the lawyer, moving uneasily in his seat.

Betta descended, and began to thank the ladies for their kindness; and, after a word or two, they drove away and left the old woman still weeping, unconscious of them, half unconscious of what she clasped and kissed, except that it represented gain contrasted with an irreparable loss. In that confusion of many sorrows, all lifting up their voices at once, it was the first grief of her life which presented itself most distinctly to her mind; and instead of mourning anew her husband and sons, or the daughter newly dead,

her own long-forgotten mother's was the image which presented itself, and the deeply covered wound of her loss broke out afresh and bled.

"*Oh, mamma mia!*" she cried; and it seemed as though the babe in her arms were herself, and she who spoke but the wild wraith of its bereavement.

That evening, as the ladies sat in their hotel after dinner, the Sor Teresa, with her grandchild and Betta, came to see them.

"I wish to thank the *signori* for their kindness, and apologize for my conduct," she said; and she was, in fact, greatly mortified at the scene she had made.

They found her a dignified woman, far more reserved than Betta had been; and she did not volunteer any more information concerning her daughter.

"But the child is the true heiress, is she not?" Mrs. Nelson asked, almost impatiently.

The Sor Teresa glanced about her, then looked straight into the lady's eyes. "Signora," she said, "I have no proof of my daughter's marriage." And she thought, "What sent these bunglers here to play with fire, and put my only treasure in peril?"

"Did you not witness the marriage?" persisted the lady.

The Sor Teresa pressed her lips together. Almost a fierce impulse seized her to strike the mouth that spoke.

"Don't you understand?" whispered Elizabeth, in English. "As the next heiress, the child is not so safe as the father was!"

Mrs. Nelson had told the story to the young men, and had declared her intention of keeping an eye on the orphan, and doing something for her education. It pleased her vanity to think that she should be the patroness of one who ought to be a countess in her

own right. She propounded this plan now to the grandmother. She would send a certain sum quarterly to some responsible person in the town, and it was to be used first for the child's necessities, if she were in need; and secondly, to give her as good an education as the place afforded.

"It had better be sent to the mayor of the town," she said. "Who is the mayor now?"

"The Signor Francesco Alinori," said the old woman briefly.

Mrs. Nelson bit her lip, and considered.

"It is just the thing!" the lawyer struck in. "Make them responsible, and they will not dare to harm her. We will see him before we go away."

The old woman, after a moment's thought, consented; and she smiled faintly and bowed, as she addressed her consent to Mr. Elder. Here was one person, at least, who had some astuteness. "But he shall have no authority over mine, signora," she added hastily.

"Certainly not!" Mrs. Nelson promised, and began to define her plans more minutely.

"I have some money in a box," the Sor Teresa said. "I don't know how much it is."

"Oh! that can go for present needs," said Mrs. Nelson. "But what will you call the little girl?"

It was a cruel question, and hard to answer. To call her Giorgini would make enemies, and perpetuate enmity without gaining anything: to call her Lanciani was to resign all hope of future justice, and to slander her own daughter.

Mrs. Nelson brought forward the plan she had been cherishing the whole afternoon, and carried it against all opposition. The child was to be called "Beatrice da Sanzio."

Betta did not go back to Sanzio that day; she staid all night with the Sor Teresa; and when everything was still, and the child asleep, they cut open the old Countess Giorgini's money-box, and, as its contents rolled into the old woman's apron, both voices set up a cry. The only silver pieces were what had been put in that morning: all the rest was gold. The old countess, making a show of copper or silver for Betta's eyes, had every week for two years dropped a gold napoleon into the box. There were one hundred and four of them.

"You see! she knew that my daughter's child was the heiress!" cried the old woman fiercely; and gathering up the money, flung the apron with it across the room. "She would never have given gold otherwise. They have robbed my child, the devils!"

"At least don't throw away the little you have got," said Betta soothingly, and went round picking up the coins that dotted with gold the rough brick floor.

CHAPTER V.

STRANDED.

The Sor Teresa's chamber had two windows, one overlooking the grassy *piazza*, the other completely covered by an enormous fig-tree that thrust its leaves quite into the room. There was a large bed in one corner, shaded by an old curtain of coarse dark red silk. There was an oaken chest containing her small store of household linen, the remains of her wedding outfit, her wedding dress of silver-threaded brocade, and her large black veil of hand-made netting worked with solid flowers. This veil was so transparent that, when held up single, the flowers looked like winged things floating in the air. There was an oaken credence, an *intarsio* work-box, and a delicate red-wood table with cross legs. In a tiny closet in the wall, hidden by a picture of the Madonna, was a box containing her own wedding pearls, now somewhat discolored. She had given them to her daughter on her marriage; and when the young countess died they had been sent back to her.

The large fireplace in one corner of the room answered as kitchen. A table stood so near as to be almost inside of it, and quite inside hung the saucepans and earthen utensils for cooking. A few chairs and a table completed the furnishing of the chamber.

It was the morning after her grandchild's arrival, and the room was dazzling with a golden-green illumination. The sun and the fig-tree were having their

daily struggle at the eastern window. Beatrice had waked at early dawn, had been given a cup of goat's milk and a piece of bread, and had run about in the small garden and on the house-top, till, tired and warm, she fell asleep again. Betta had taken a weeping leave of her and gone back to Sanzio.

The Sor Teresa stood and looked at the sleeping child, unwilling to wake her. Yet she had work to do; and it must be done out-of-doors. A pile of unbleached cotton thread lay on the table, and it must be all doubled and twisted before sunset.

She waited a while, then took a round basket down from the wall, and made a nest of it. First she placed a pillow, over that a shawl, and then a small thick bough from the fig-tree set up at one edge as a sun-shade. Lastly, under a corner of the shawl, she hid a yellow apricot, a bit of bread, and a tiny bottle of wine and water.

She smiled to herself with a tremulous delight as she made these preparations, her thoughts fluttering back to her own early motherhood, and that wondering ecstasy over her first babe. Was this the child, or was it another? She felt confused sometimes, she had suffered so much.

The nest prepared, she softly lifted the little sleeper and laid her in it, waited a moment till the slight stir of being disturbed had changed to slumber again, then lifted the basket to her head, and went out bearing the child like a crown.

The dome of the church threw its shadow on the grass. Sor Teresa set the basket in that curve of shade, and began her work.

Presently there was a jingling of bells and a trampling of horses. The two carriages of the Americans drew up at the gate, and they all descended and came

up to her. Seeing the child asleep in its pretty cradle, they hushed themselves and stood looking at her.

"She has gone to sleep on the shady side of the moon," James Martin said, looking at the half-circle of shadow that surrounded her.

Mrs. Nelson gave the Sor Teresa a directed envelope. "This is my American address," she said. "Have me written to if anything should happen to you or Beatrice. I have arranged that the Signor Francesco Alinori shall draw on me once a year for fifty dollars, which he will place in your hands. You will go to him for it. He says that he is going to have a governess in the house for his own little girl, and that when our Beatrice is able, he will allow her to come and take her lessons without paying. It is a very agreeable offer; and I find him very gentlemanly. Remember to have her carefully brought up, and never allow her to be called by any other name than Beatrice da Sanzio, unless she should prove her right to her father's name."

"Tell her not to let the young one go into a convent, either as pupil or nun," Mr. Elder struck in. "Or, I will tell her myself. See here, old woman!" touching her on the shoulder. "Erre — *non lettere* —"

"Oh! Oh!" laughed the two ladies.

"— *permettere*, I mean," the young man persevered, unabashed, "*che* — *che* — Beatrice — *mettere* — *mai* — *mai mettere!*" with oratorical emphasis; — "erre — *piede* — *sopra porta convento. Mai! Mai!!*"

A chorus of feminine laughter greeted this effort.

"Now that you have distinguished yourself," Miss Martin said, "perhaps you will go and count to make sure that all our twenty-seven parcels are in the carriage. But please don't count in Italian. You are quite too infinitely infinite for accuracy."

"I could learn Italian in a month," Mr. Elder declared. "All you've got to do is to take a word out of some other language and put a little curly tail on it. Their words run as glibly as their little pigs. By Jove! I didn't know till I came here that a pig could run. Some words are like the other end of the beast, cut square off: *più, giù.* A few simple rules, and you can talk right off."

"I once knew a rheumatic old lady who went on that principle," James Martin said. "She used to tell her maid to *rubare* her ankle. She meant rub; but the poor girl didn't seem to understand."

"Do you remember how we used to talk hog-Latin and pig-Latin when we were little boys?" Selwyn asked.

"Yiffus, yiggery," answered Martin; and they laughed. It took so little to make them laugh.

The ladies, having had a confidential domestic consultation with the Sor Teresa, came out to their carriage.

"It is all nicely settled," Mrs. Nelson said. "And I shouldn't be surprised if a fine romance were one day to grow out of it. To think of our little girl going into the household of the very family which is to have her title and estates! I predict that she will marry the little son of our *sindaco.*"

She took his card from her pocketbook, and read the name out: "Francesco Alinori," and pointed complacently to the coronet.

"I shall write him to keep the child out of convents," announced Mr. Francis Elder.

"Yes," said Miss Elizabeth, "write him to not *lettere permettere mettere, et cetera.*"

"But you can't be sure that she may not herself choose such a life," Mrs. Nelson said. "Those influences are in the very air that she breathes."

"Of course," replied the lawyer. "But I know the value of protest, and persistent protest. Why, a flea which persists is stronger than a lion which gives up."

"A flea which persists," repeated Elizabeth Martin dreamily; and, pushing up her sleeve from the wrist, displayed a score of little pink dots on her white arm. "A flea which persists!" she murmured, contemplating these dots, and then proceeding to count them with a pretty finger-tip.

"No!" the lawyer went on seriously. "I will never give the help of my silence to what I disapprove of, from the idea that speech is vain. It is never in vain. It keeps our own souls alive, if no more. It is not our lungs alone which breathe through our lips: it is our brain and heart."

"That's right! That's right!" said James Martin, and laid his hand on the speaker's shoulder and smiled into his face.

It struck the whole company at that moment that there was something peculiarly noble in James Martin's face.

They were waiting for some fresh lemons which they had sent back for, and which came presently, tied up in a blue cotton handkerchief.

The Sor Teresa watched them, laughing, jeering, scolding, merry over everything. She saw them step into their carriages, seat themselves, rise, search among their packages, call to each other, settle finally into place, and drive away. They all waved their handkerchiefs to her on parting, and she courtesied to them. There was a lessening sound of bells, hoofs, and wheels, a faint cloud of dust above the city wall; and they were gone. The dead old town seemed more than ever dead. They had come like a wave of the

sea over a dry beach, life-bringing, making the stones glisten for an hour, flinging spray and shells and seaweed, ebbing back again into the great unknown.

But the wave had left her a pearl!

She turned to look at the sleeping child, and went on with her work again.

Beatrice waked, ate her luncheon, and wandered about the grass. She was quiet and wistful, and seemed rather lost. She suffered her grandmother's caresses, but did not return them; and could scarcely be persuaded to speak. Now and then she would stop and look earnestly at the Sor Teresa.

The sacristan of the church came out to make her acquaintance, and she willingly accompanied him to see the Madonna, and lay a little flower on her altar.

With sunset, the Sor Teresa's work was done. The whole grassy square was glowing a red gold.

"Come, darling, and we will get some supper," she said; and when the child came quietly to her arms, she asked, "Why do you look at me so, dear? Do you not know who I am?"

"Are you Tessa come back?" asked Beatrice, gazing at her doubtfully.

Tessa was *contessa*, and her name for her other grandmother.

"No, I am not Tessa," replied the old woman with a sigh. "Tessa robbed you!" she added bitterly.

CHAPTER VI.

TEN YEARS AFTER.

At Ombra. You go out from the Porta del Sole, and, stepping from under the shadow of its round arch, leave behind the dusty streets, the gray stone walls, and all the arid solitude of a lifeless old Italian town. You draw a fuller breath at sight of the beautiful outer world, and a frigid disgust leaves you at that view, like unclean snow melting under a full spring rain. If you are vigorous, you may feel an inclination to run.

The road has run: As soon as the stones were off its back, it swung smoothly round a group of chestnut trees, and was off into the green country.

At the left, the land rises in a huge concave scooped out against a mountain range. This great amphitheatre is lined with protruding rocks and cliffs; small, level tracts, terraced and cultivated; headlong turf, broken and sliding in heavy rains; peeping country-houses, and above, a wide space, green-gray with ledge and herbs, where a crooked thread of a yellow path crinkles upward, to disappear without seeming to have arrived at anything, as it reaches beyond the range of lower vision.

At the right there is a gentle slope to the plain, with corn, wheat, vines, chestnut and walnut groves, and here and there a cane-brake, or a tiny olive-orchard. The plain is a beautiful picture: wide, like a lake, set round with mountains, and all a mass of

wheat, with a delicate *sfumatura* of olive-trees running through it, and giving it the appearance of floating.

It was a fine morning in October, the heavens glorious with a mild and generous light, the heights and the plain sparkling with freshness and color. The sun had been shining for hours on all the landscape except this eastern hollow, which received its morning from the west; and the road was still in shadow. Moving along in the shadow was a tiny donkey with enormous ears, bearing a very fat man on his back. Giuseppe, Don Francesco Alinori's farmer, had been to town for the morning mail, and to execute a number of domestic commissions for the Signora Alinori and her daughter Aldegonda. The family was in *villeggiatura*.

Giuseppe's feet hung nearly to the ground; and the donkey's small hoofs made, as he walked, a dainty click-clack, like the heels of a lady's slippers.

Not far behind them was a tall pedestrian. He was a fine-looking gentleman about thirty years of age, and he walked with an easy swing, holding his hat in his hand. Now and then he paused to look about him, as though seeing the place for the first time; and at every pause he drew a fuller breath, and put his shoulders back. There was the light of a smile in his pleasant, searching eyes, and transpiring in some way through the somewhat patriarchal beard that covered all the lower part of his face.

About a mile from the city gate, a broad path led off from the road, gradually and obliquely ascending. The man on the donkey glanced back at the gentleman as he turned into this path, and received in reply a nod and a wave of the hat. Giuseppe was acting as guide.

The stranger was strong and elastic, and full of life

and health. His glance was frank and kind, his brow broad, his teeth sound, his hands sinewy. His face showed a character capable of generosity, enthusiasm, and a splendid anger.

He was a young American doctor who had been studying and travelling in Europe, after having graduated at home; and he was now, after a brief visit to the East, about to return to his native land and put into practice what he had learned. As he said, his hive was full of honey.

He turned into the path and went up dreamily for a while, till the barking of a dog recalled him. At that sound, he lifted his head, gave himself a vigorous slap on the breast, and quickened his pace.

The slap was not a *meâ culpâ*, but meant to make sure that the breast-pocket was not empty. In that pocket, beside a respectably filled purse, was a letter written by a Florentine banker to the most illustrious Signore, the Signor Don Francesco Alinori; and the writer begged leave to present to his dear Checco the egregious Signor Professor James Martin, a distinguished physician from America; and he did so with a flourish of trumpets that might have abashed a more timid bearer.

The young doctor was anything but timid; and as he glanced over this letter for the last time before presenting it, he thought it a very good one. To be sure he was not renowned, as the writer declared, and his title to be called distinguished might have been questioned; but he meant to distinguish himself, and he expected people of discernment to perceive that he was not an insignificant person. And he was right. For nature signs the work on which she takes pains, though with but a hieroglyph; and those who bear the signature recognize each other.

Dr. Martin folded the letter, and restored it to his pocket-book. The path had now reached an opening luxuriant with field and orchard, vineyard and garden, richly cultivated from the grove that hid the road up to the bare mountain ledge. There was a large, rough stone house with a brilliant disorder about it, and a trellis in front supported on stone pillars, and roofed over by two immense grapevines that grew with trunks that for size were like trees. These vines still held the later ripening clusters; but the cane-staked *vigna* beyond had been denuded weeks before, and the wine was already working — a light, champagne-like muscatel, and strong aliatico, with a flavor of birch bark. The almonds had been gathered, but the walnuts, though ripe, still hung on the trees; pomegranates were changing from orange color to brown, and there was a peach-tree glowing with large crimson cling-stones, a delight to the eyes, but as tough as a sponge to the teeth.

There was corn waiting to be husked, a mimic mountain of rough, shining gold; bins of wheat were visible through the open doors of breezy storehouses, and poultry of every sort were wandering at will, and picking up the remains of the harvest. A small herd of swine also enjoyed the pastoral freedom of the domain, and took in very good part the gentle rebuffs which met them at the house door, the flower-garden, the walnut-grove, and the drying-ground.

The drying-ground was a wonderful sight, a snow-field of linen, on this bright morning. It occurred to the doctor that the family probably did their clothes-washing only twice a year, like some German families.

This estate was the Villa Alinori, formerly Villa Cassini, from the family to whom it had belonged, and whose heiress had joined her *contadina* wealth to the

rank and poverty of a younger son of the Alinori. At present only one brother, Tommaso, stood between her husband and the Alinori title; and, as we have seen, only the simple Giovanni prevented their enjoying the Giorgini title and possessions. Tommaso and Giovanni out of the way, the rich *contadina's* husband would become Count Giorgini, and transfer his family to Sanzio; and her young son, Francesco, would be Count Alinori.

The Signora Anna Alinori was therefore a proud and happy woman socially; but that had not prevented her betrothing her eldest daughter, Aldegonda, to a wealthy farmer's son, and promising her own son to a daughter of the same house. "A man without money is a dead man who walks," she quoted. "What the Alinori want is money. Their nobility will take care of itself. A title is a cork that floats when gold goes to the bottom."

It was Aldegonda's *corredo* of linen which lay like an arrested avalanche on the drying-ground, bushes, hedges, trees, lines, stakes and stubble. One hundred of everything was the rule; and no girl of respectable family could think of going to her husband with less.

The only persons visible to the doctor as he approached the house were a young girl of fourteen who leaned against one of the stone posts of the trellis, and a gentleman who smoked while he read a newspaper under the shade of a walnut-grove at some distance. But as soon as he himself became visible, a graceful youth appeared in the door, and hastened out to meet him.

"What a picture of a boy!" thought the doctor.

Blond hair lay in loose waves about a perfect brow, the gray eyes were clear and well shaped, the mouth a woman's mouth, red, full, and arched. A delicately

shaded golden down followed the curve of the upper lip.

"I have been watching for you," the young man said, with a smile and salutation at once dignified and winning. "Our farmer has told us of your coming. If you will do me the favor" — waving his hand toward the house — "I will go and call my father." Another wave of the hand indicated the walnut-grove.

"Why should we disturb him now?" the doctor said. "He has but just received his paper. While he is looking it over, perhaps you would be so kind as to walk about the place with me. I find it very interesting. It looks as though a cornucopia of fruit had been poured down over you."

The Signor Alinori had just received his paper, and was looking it over; but its contents were far from being able at that moment to engross his attention. He merely thought it proper to ignore the presence of his guest till it should have been announced to him.

"Certainly we can look about the villa, if you wish," the young man said. "But my father would be displeased with me if I did not introduce you at once. Beatrice, have I left my hat here?"

The last words, uttered in a caressing voice, which atoned for the evident request, were addressed to the girl leaning against the trellis post.

She started, her pensive look changed to a smile of pleasure, and she ran to get the hat. They were walking slowly away when she came behind them and slipped it into the boy's hand. As she did so, bending forward, her eyes were raised to his face, and a smile illumined her own for a moment.

The young man gave her a careless nod, and she returned to her post, and leaned there looking after him.

She was rather pretty, though ill-dressed: and there was something sad and solitary in her air.

The doctor, glancing back, found her a picturesque figure as she stood there motionless in the dancing lights and shadows of the vine-leaves. It did not occur to him that she might be an old acquaintance of his. When Mrs. Nelson died, five years before, he knew that she had left a small annuity to the child they had picked up somewhere in Italy; but the later crowding incidents of his life had quite covered up a fact which to him had little interest. His sister would have remembered had she been there, but had not thought to remind him. His correspondence with Mrs. Elizabeth Elder treated chiefly of more brilliant scenes and characters.

Elizabeth Martin had been now for nine years the wife of Mr. Francis Elder, and was fully occupied by her family cares and social ambitions. The news she asked her brother for was of courts and courtly people; and thus it happened that the doctor failed to recognize what was, perhaps, one of the most interesting encounters of his life.

Inside the house the Signora Alinori was at that moment declaring herself to be in a state of desperation. Here was a mountain of linen to iron and pack, the house in town to be prepared for Aldegonda's wedding, and the family to move; and only one week in which to do it. Yet just at this time visitors must come! The Sor Chiara Mattei, the mother of Aldegonda's betrothed, had sent word that she should come out to see them that morning; and an American had already come. Of course, both these guests must be invited to dinner. Visitors in town can be gotten rid of: but visitors in villa must eat. It would be necessary to kill two chickens; and in the market two

chickens would bring three *lire*. The Lord knew they had need to economize after having bought a hundred of everything, and raked and scraped to give Aldegonda a thousand *scudi* in money. "And everything comes out of *my* pocket," concluded the Signora Alinori.

These complaints were poured forth in a high-pitched, snarling voice, which from time to time cracked with emotion: and the speaker was standing before a long dining-table, which commanded a view of the road and the walnuts. One guessed why the master of the house preferred to read his paper at a distance: The lady's audience consisted of two peasant women who assisted her to sprinkle the hundred sheets of her daughter's *corredo*. Aldegonda herself was ironing pocket-handkerchiefs at another table by a distant window, and did not seem to hear her mother's voice. A dreamy, complacent half-smile hovered over her pretty face as she daintily folded and smoothed the squares of linen and lawn stitched and embroidered by her own hands. Visions of the future hung about her like a mist.

"The Sor Chiara pretends to think that it is all very easy," the Signora went on spitefully. "But she wasn't always so rich. The time has been when she couldn't have had a chicken even by going on her knees for it; and everybody knows that her mother"—

She checked herself just in time, recollecting that the grandson of this woman was to be her son-in-law.

Through an open door a large, rough kitchen was visible, in which a fire of twigs was blazing on an elevated hearth and half a dozen little charcoal furnaces at which irons were heating and saucepans

steaming. A third *contadina* here was counting walnuts into a sack, and dexterously slipping one into her own capacious pocket from time to time. A fourth was making *maccheroni*. The stiff paste of flour and eggs rolled thin hung over the side of the table like a cover, and a kitten was slyly reaching toward it, with one eye on the roller.

The Signora Alinori, glancing through the window, gave a kind of snort. "Oh, yes!" she said, and tossed her head into the air.

The *Sindaco*, as his family still called him, though it was years since he had occupied that office, was coming to the house. He had received his visitor with elaborate courtesy, and, after a few minutes' conversation, had begged leave to absent himself for a moment.

The Signor Francesco Alinori was a rather stout gentleman, whom his son resembled in features, though not in expression. The father could be charming, but was often surly in look and speech.

"Here comes the *Sindaco* to order a banquet of thirty courses," exclaimed his wife; and she shook the sprinkler she held with such violence that the ball came off the handle, and flew across the room.

One of the *contadine* picked it up, screwed it into the handle again, and filled it with water, glancing slyly at her companion. It was well understood by the familiars of the house that the *Sindaco* and his wife hated each other.

The gentleman entered. "I want a bottle of *vin santo* of '35 and some cakes sent out to the grove," he said with an air of quiet authority. "Teresina," — to one of the *contadine*, — "carry out the little round table." Then, addressing his wife again, "Send two or three bunches of grapes, and the glasses

with the gilt rim. Giovanna," — to the second *contadina*, — "go and gather the grapes."

The two women made haste to obey, feeling themselves in a tempestuous atmosphere; and the husband, wife and daughter were left together.

The Signora, without seeming to have heard the request addressed to her, continued to wield her sprinkler, increasing in violence as her anger increased. Her husband, coldly watching her movements, marked the drops of water coming nearer to him with every shake of the sprinkler, till finally a small shower reached the sleeve of his black velveteen morning jacket.

"If you do that again, I will throw the whole basinful over your head," he muttered hoarsely.

The Signora dropped her sprinkler, and flounced angrily out into the kitchen, whence her voice was immediately heard in shrill reproof. The kitten, popping mischievously out from under the table, had snatched at the hanging sheet of *maccheroni* paste, and come to grief. For, the roller having been lifted at the same instant, the whole mass had slipped down to the floor, covering the hapless animal like a blanket, only a small gray head with very frightened eyes protruding.

The Signora shook her *contadina* by the arm, which she pinched at the same time, lifted the fallen paste, whimpering hysterically the while, and further relieved her feelings by kicking the kitten. The small mischief-maker, squawking, sought refuge with the mother-cat, and had her ears boxed by the maternal paw for consolation.

The Signor Alinori glanced significantly at his daughter, who demurely continued her ironing. He turned upon his heel and went out. He had no fear

of not being obeyed. In fact, Teresina was already setting the little table near Doctor Martin's elbow; and in a few minutes Giovanna appeared, bearing a brass tray that shone like gold. In the tray were glasses and a plate of *ciambelli*. She had scarcely gone when a third woman approached with a second glistening tray holding a bottle of wine and a plate of grapes.

The visitor watched everything with a smiling interest. He found something patriarchal in this multiplicity of service. "Whose fault is it," he thought, "that domestic service is getting to be held dishonorable in other lands? Is it the fault of master or servant? What will bring about the true balance?"

His meditations were interrupted by the return of his host: and the two were soon engaged in a discussion which did not interest the son. Francesco, junior, returned to the house.

"What sort of man is this American?" his mother asked.

"He is a tall man who swings his cane going up hill," the son replied.

"Anybody can swing a cane," was the retort.

"But everybody doesn't, especially when he has had a long walk, and is climbing a hill," the son returned; and, without further parley, went out into the kitchen and began to tease the servants.

"Just like his father!" the Signora muttered. "Always hanging around the women!"

As he left the room by one door, Beatrice entered by another. She looked at him wistfully as he withdrew, but did not follow.

The Signora began to lament herself to this new auditor.

"Don't you want me to do the stockings?" the girl asked with quick obligingness and sympathy. "You must be tired. I will do them nicely. I will sprinkle, fold and iron every one of them."

The expression, and even the color, of the girl's face changed as she spoke. There was a faint rose color over the cheeks, a sweet, gracious smile, and the voice was meltingly soft, half with tenderness, half with timidity.

"It would be such a help to me, Bice," the Signora said in a gentle tone, and handed over a pile of fine thread and silk stockings, all knit by hand.

"I sometimes wish that I had no land," she went on in a quieter voice, soothed by the first sympathy she had met. "I have a mind to let it for half, and live in town all the year. It makes a slave of me. There are the silk-worms, now; no one can see to them but me. When Giuseppe took care of them they were perfectly brown, and the silk no better than *bavella*. This year they are large, and as clear as amber; and the silk is as glossy as gold. Then the oil — if I didn't look after it, it would be fit only for the lamps. And I must stand by when the wine is changed; and I must count the eggs, and measure the corn, and wheat, and chestnuts, and walnuts. And as for the lentils, not a cart-load is sent away that I do not keep account of."

"You know so much! And you do everything so well!" the girl murmured.

A sound of wheels was heard, and a victoria drawn by a stout pony appeared. There was a momentary vision of a rubicund face looking over the driver's shoulder; but it subsided as quickly as it rose. This was the Sor Chiara Mattei, Aldegonda's prospective mother-in-law. Her family was a good deal richer

than that of the Signora Alinori, and her villa was not a farm also; but she had not the advantage of having made an aristocratic marriage.

"Run and meet her!" the Signora Alinori said to her daughter. "Don't let her know that I have seen her; but make her understand that we are overwhelmed with work. Let her come in here if she wants to."

A bustling, self-satisfied, good-natured-looking woman presently entered, and saluted everybody with effusion, kissing Beatrice on both cheeks, and standing a moment holding her in a half-embrace.

Beatrice was afraid of the Signora Alinori, whose rude tongue was worse to her than a lash; but she was quite at her ease with this woman, who, next to Betta, was the best friend she had in the world. Betta was the Signora Mattei's housekeeper; and from her the lady had learned all of Beatrice's affairs which it was not thought prudent to tell publicly.

In her the orphan felt that she had found a friend and protectress. But for the watchful eyes and frank remarks of the Mattei, Beatrice might have sunk to an almost servile position in casa Alinori, though Mrs. Nelson's pension would have been considered in any other house in town sufficient for a modest maintenance. It was the Signora Mattei who kept alive the fact that the piano in the town drawing-room belonged to Beatrice, and that the French master who had given lessons to Aldegonda and Francesco as well as to her received pay only for one. "It is as easy to teach three as one," the Signora Alinori had said. And it was again the Signora Mattei who pointed out to everybody that the little gold watch among Aldegonda's wedding presents had been given to the child

by Mrs. Nelson, but accepted from her *protégée's* generosity by both mother and daughter.

There had been some discussion in the family over this gift, both the father and son objecting most decidedly to its acceptance. It would be mean to take it, they said.

"It would be cruel not to accept the only thing that I can give," protested Beatrice tearfully. "Everybody else is giving something."

The Signor Alinori looked at her attentively a moment, then laid his hand kindly on her head. "We will take it, then," he said, "and on your eighteenth birthday I will give you another watch, and a prettier one than that."

The Signora Mattei had come to announce that the present which custom required the bridegroom to give to his bride had been received at Ombra, and to beg Aldegonda to go in town with her to see it. This was a *cadeau* of four dresses, a bonnet, and a cloak.

Aldegonda hastened to prepare herself for the drive, while her mother listened with a feeling of mingled pleasure and mortification to her visitor's description of the finery. She had already suffered from the greater richness of the presents that came from the other side. Her generous piles of linen and clumsy old silver made but a poor show beside the sparkling gold and shining silks of the Mattei. She had hoped for something from the Giorgini; but though Aldegonda's marriage had been announced to the Countess Maria, no response except ceremonious good wishes had been vouchsafed.

But when the Signora Mattei said, "I shall ask you for only a dozen invitation cards," her comfortable sense of superiority was at once restored; for that part of the wedding announcement which set forth

the name and state of the bride was surmounted by a coronet.

The cards were brought forth, and produced the desired effect. The *contadina* sank at once to her proper place among the *mezzo ceto* crowd. Her head advanced itself a little, her smile changed from flattering to flattered; and she took the twenty cards offered as reverentially as a loyal subject takes the extended hand of royalty on presentation day.

CHAPTER VII.

SOUTHPORT.

The town of Southport is a very good specimen of a green-and-white New England city. There are rows of trees, chiefly elms, in the principal streets; and at the time of which we write there still remained some of those square, flat-roofed houses set in gardens, which wealthy people built for themselves seventy-five or a hundred years ago.

The city, as its name implies, was built on the sea.

Among its chief families were the Selwyns; and when Charles was in Europe, they were the richest family in town. But the broken leg which had kept his father at home was the beginning of a series of misfortunes for them. The remainder of Mr. Selwyn's history resembled that of Job, minus the patience. There was something grotesque in the succession of disasters which robbed them piecemeal of all their possessions but the homestead in Southport, and a microscopic annuity which in better days Mrs. Selwyn had devoted to charity. It is a detail to explain that with Mrs. Selwyn charity meant converting some far-away heathen people to New England ideas.

They managed to get Charles through college and his medical studies; and the father died happy in the conviction that prosperity had returned to his family, if not to himself. He had lived to see his son a doctor, and to hear the sound of the hammer which affixed his sign to one of the white posts beside their

garden gate. He did not know that the sign was unpaid for; and if he could look back and see that it was not likely to be soon paid for, we cannot know.

Mrs. Selwyn and Edith, through their tears for the departed, kept anxious watch on the street and that gate; while Charles, in his office in the back drawing-room, listened breathlessly to every tinkle of the bell which might announce a patient.

But the patients did not come. They passed by on the other side, going to old Doctor Blake, who was rich, avaricious, and childless. Or, they went to old Doctor Martin, who was not rich, indeed, but had a money-making family. There was John, his eldest son, who had shops and houses, and the beginning of a merchant fleet, while David was following in John's footsteps. There was Elizabeth, the wife of Mr. Francis Elder, the most successful criminal lawyer in town, the terror of prosecuting virtue, and the bright morning-star of rascality of every species. And — hats off! — there was James, the famous young doctor who had studied abroad, made his bow to royalty in England, sent his sister mosses and flowers from India, his mother a bag of Mocha from Cairo, and his father a monumental pipe from Constantinople.

At that time, 1844, a person who had lived abroad was distinguished; and Southport was proud of young Doctor Martin. They all knew that he was coming home to take his father's practice; and they knew that he owed his foreign travels chiefly to the generosity of his maiden aunt, Miss Betsey Martin.

In fact, the family owed a good many favors to this same maiden aunt. It was she who had given John and David the first little push that had launched them on the sea of fortune; and it was she who had given Mrs. Elizabeth Elder all her wedding linen and a

beautiful basket of flannels, lawns and laces to her first baby, Francis junior.

Everybody knew, too, that Miss Betsey adored her nephew James, and meant to leave him all her savings and her township down east. This township was a large tract of land, partly wild, and had been left to the maiden Betsey by a lover of her youth. She passed six months of every year on this estate, and came back rosy and sun-burnt, and with a wind-swept freshness of look and manner which did credit to her true lover's legacy. She always returned accompanied by a good many barrels, six of which radiated a delightful orchard fragrance.

One of these six had always been the sacred barrel of the boys. No one but themselves could knock the head out of it, and no one could even see it knocked out without their permission. Its contents were invariable: a sample of all the apples and pears grown on aunt Betsey's farm, with a bag of beech-nuts at the top.

Miss Martin took James to Beechlands, as she called her place, one summer, and the boy remembered it with an enthusiasm which influenced all his future life. No forest scenes of other lands had ever lifted nobler branches to his fancy, or rustled with so sweet a music; and often when he saw some quiet rustic dwelling far away from home, his thought went back to the brown log house at Beechlands, and it seemed to him as picturesque and more comfortable by far.

The young doctor travelled with speed. Everything was planned in advance, and a vast amount of preparatory reading was done. His first brief tour had been but a sentimental journey, and he had brought home only some brilliant, blurred impressions. This was a more philosophical and humanitarian pilgrimage.

The villa life of the Alinori charmed him. He found himself wishing that such a life were possible to reproduce at Beechlands. The many *contadini* about, all busy, but working leisurely, without pressure or care; the easy relations between master and servant; the plenty, the ready smile, the grace, even the confusion — all made a picture pleasant to his eyes. He was not so simple as not to know that this was but the surface, and that the moral life of these poor easy laborers was not conspicuously honest; but he sighed for something of that grace to drape the rough virtues of his native rustics.

He thought painfully over the subject as, having declined company, he strolled backward to the town of Ombra that evening.

"Must I distrust so much that is pleasant," he asked himself, "and be forever on my guard against its charms? The *lasciar andare* does very well in matters of taste, but not when it is a question of right and wrong."

He reached his hotel in a golden silent gloaming, and was met by his landlady, who smilingly presented him with a package of letters forwarded by his banker. He glanced them over as he ate his solitary dinner, at which the landlady served him with an extraordinary solicitude. When he retired to his chamber he was surprised to see her follow him. She lighted his candles, though it was hardly dark, beat up his pillows, asked if he wouldn't have a bottle of wine sent to him, and showed herself so loath to go that he finally suggested the good-night she seemed to have forgotten. Then she stopped before him, with one hand hidden in her apron pocket.

"There is one more letter, Signore," she said. "I hope that it does not bring you bad news."

"One more letter?" he echoed. "What do you mean?"

She half drew it from her pocket. "I did not give it to you before dinner, lest it might spoil your appetite," she said.

He silently took from her hand a black-bordered, thick letter, and seated himself to read it. The woman stood looking at him, watching his expression with a real anxiety. She had not known him twenty-four hours; yet when she saw his brows knit as he laid aside a large double sheet closely written, and unfolded a briefer letter enclosing it, she made a quick forward movement, as quickly checked, and bit her lips to keep silence.

He read, and dropped his face into his hands.

"I knew it!" the woman cried. "O Signore, I was sure that there was sorrow in that letter. I knew that ill news was coming; for last night I heard an owl crying like an infant on the roof of the church opposite. I said to my husband: 'Something is going to happen here.' And he said: '*Ma, che!* the only thing that will happen will be that I shall catch that owl. It's just what I want; for I am going lark-shooting,' says he. And says I—"

She broke off; for the doctor lifted his face, and she saw traces of tears in his eyes.

"Oh, Signore! what has happened?"

"Poor Aunt Betsey!" he said, and took up the long letter he had laid aside. "I have lost a dear aunt, who was a second mother to me. She has been sick a long time, and wouldn't let me know lest it should trouble me or make me give up some journey I wished to take. See! she wrote this letter in the last days of her life; a little every day. Oh! oh!" and he wept.

The woman was weeping too. She patted him on the head and shoulder, said all the comforting words she could think of, begged him to have patience, and finally induced him to speak. It was the best comfort she could have given him: and the doctor presently found himself relating his story to this sympathizing listener. With anguish in his voice, he spoke of his aunt's love for him, and of the fresh, bright health of her sixty years. And then — his hostess still wiping her eyes, and murmuring words of sympathy — he translated that pathetic, yet cheerful, last letter. He did not observe how his listener's expression changed as he went on. Her tears ceased, her eyes enlarged and brightened, and her mouth remained open with the eagerness of her listening.

"She leaves it all to you!" she exclaimed, the moment he ceased. "It is all yours?" Her hand pressed his arm.

"What?" asked the doctor, absently. "Oh, the money? Yes, she leaves it to me."

"How good of her!" the landlady cried, with sparkling eyes. "It must be an immense fortune."

"I don't know," he replied, still absently. "No; it is not immense. Poor aunty! I wish I hadn't staid so long. How glad you would have been to see me."

"There must be a good deal of land," the Italian pursued. "And it is all yours now?"

The doctor did not reply. Her questions had begun to reach and grate upon him. He wondered now how he could have read that sacred letter to a stranger.

The landlady felt herself dismissed, and, after a few more words, left him to his grief. She went the more promptly because the incident had given her

numbers for the lottery, and it was already Friday evening. *Doctor, dead aunt, fortune* and *owl* — why! she ought to get a *terno* and two *ambos* out of it. She had half a mind to put five *paoli* into a *quaterno*. Only it might be *land* instead of *fortune*, *man crying* instead of *doctor*, and *mourning letter* instead of *dead aunt*.

Anyway, there was no time to lose. She found her dream and lottery book; called a servant to go to the office for her; and, finding no other piece of paper at hand, tore a blank leaf out of her prayer-book to write the numbers on. This done, she pushed her lagging messenger out of the door with such force that the girl ran stumbling half-way across the *piazza* before regaining her equilibrium.

"There!" said the landlady, sinking into a chair; "I told you so!"

This remark was addressed to her husband, who entered at that moment in top-boots, with a rifle slung across his shoulders, and a tall, white pen-feather stuck jauntily in the band of his gray felt hat. But his game-bag hung very limp.

He had been visible only a moment before, riding up to the door; one of those superb horsemen one sees in Italy, where the men are centaurs. They are the best horsemen in the world, especially men of the middle class and those brought up in the country. Much use of the carriage spoils the horseman. It is not that these men are more showy in the chase, or sit their horses better than some soldiers of other lands; but they do not seem to know that there is a horse under them.

Certain appreciative glances from a lady across the street had sent the landlord into the house with the complacent smile and protruding breast of rampant

vanity; but his wife's withering finger of scorn produced a sudden change and collapse. He had but three larks in the bag, he was obliged to confess; and he poured the poor little gray songsters out before her.

"It is your fault," he declared, like a true son of Adam. "I told you to find me some bits of looking-glass to put on the *civetta's* head; and you were too superstitious to break one bit into three. The others had their owls all of a glitter; and the birds came about them in clouds."

"There's a *civetta* who has got looking-glass enough, and the reflection of her face is enough to break one into a thousand pieces," cried the landlady, glancing through the window and across the way. And, rising, she closed the shutters with a bang.

"Perhaps she would give me some supper," remarked the landlord, taking a step to retire from the contest.

"No, Signore!" said his wife; and, shutting the door, she set her broad back against it.

Then she shouted out her orders to some one half visible at the end of a long passage: "Take these larks and cook them, Nanna. Send Giacomo down into the cellar for some wine" [she expressed it *caccià da bè*], "and tell him to bring up the *stracchino*. Checca, bring the soup for your father. I put rice in it to-day," softening, and leaving her post at the door. "And would you like two eggs in *tegamino?* They are just laid."

The storm was over, and they sat down to table the best friends in the world.

Their guest passed the sad hours alone. Europe had suddenly lost all its color for him, and home, unforgotten, but long blurred in its outlines by nearer scenes, came out again with almost startling distinct-

ness. He saw the faces and heard the voices. The past, with a hundred trivial incidents, rose before him, and people long since dead occupied the scenes that had known them in life. Mrs. Nelson's form appeared without any apparent reason; and without any apparent reason, too, a chain of forgotten incidents connected with her brightened link by link, till they snapped as with a spark of electricity.

"Why! that little girl was the child we brought here ten years ago!" he said. "Yes, they called her Beatrice. Why didn't I think!"

He had come up to Ombra for a day only because his journey led him that way, merely recollecting that he had been there before; and his visit to Francesco Alinori had been simply a coincidence. Now he recollected all, and wondered at his forgetfulness.

The Sor Teresa Lanciani had died just before he came abroad the second time, Mrs. Nelson had told him, holding an Italian letter in her hand, when he went to take leave of her; and she had begged him to see the child, if he should ever be in her vicinity. It was too late now; for in the morning he must set off on his return to America. He was so impatient to go that he could scarcely content himself to wait till morning. He felt smitten with a sudden sense of being needed at home.

In the morning he started, travelling through a splendid daybreak, topaz all over the sky; while in his soul all was shadow and sadness.

At Florence he bought a pretty turquoise ring — "I am a rich man now," he sighed — and enclosed it in a note to the Signor Francesco Alinori, begging him to give it to Beatrice with his good wishes and excuses.

"A girl likes a ring better than a more useful

thing," he said. "Indeed, it is useful, if it makes her happy for a moment." He recollected that the child had had a sober, neglected look.

"It never rains but it pours," says the proverb. Just as the doctor was leaving London for Liverpool, a second mourning letter reached him. It was from Francis Elder, and was stained with tears. It announced to him the death of Doctor Martin, his father.

Crushed and dazed with grief, he embarked upon the ocean, which seemed to him a fit emblem of all earthly things, forever wandering, forever moaning, and forever bitter.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FAIRY GOD-FATHER.

The Selwyn homestead was one of the pleasantest old places in Southport. It was a square mansion set in the midst of gardens, the white fence on the street almost hidden in roses, and a row of elms outside. Three beautiful elms, called the Three Sisters, made a shady arbor in the midst of the garden, their tall, straight trunks supporting a mass of fountain-like verdure, tossed and drooping, far above the table and chairs kept always below. A low divan had been built around each of these trunks; and many a pleasant re-union had been held there on summer mornings or moonlighted evenings.

There were fruit-trees and a stable farther back, and a kitchen garden quite out of sight.

Everything about the place was in perfect order on a lovely June morning of the year following Doctor James Martin's return to America; but it needed all the verdure that grew there to hide the discolored walls and railings, where only a speckling of white was left. The inside of the house was unmistakably shabby, though exquisitely neat; and only at the soft twilight hour could a ghost of those once charming rooms be seen.

The Selwyns, mother, son, and daughter, had just finished their breakfast, and were sitting around the table in silence. One would have judged from their expression that they had a depressing consciousness

of nothing to do. There was no other person in the house. Mrs. Selwyn and Edith did their own work. Patrick, a servant of their better days, came every morning to work in the garden, bring them wood and draw the water. No one but themselves knew that his sole remuneration was the produce of a half of the land which he cultivated for himself. The Selwyn dignity was sacred to this faithful soul.

Mrs. Selwyn was a fragile, delicate-looking woman, with thin gray hair, sunken eyes, and "brow ruled like a score." Her slender shoulders were bent, her small hands scarred by labor. The time was long past when she had washed her dishes at arm's-length with a swab, and handled pots and kettles with old gloves on to protect her fair fingers. All this rough work fell to her; for Edith must do the sewing and mending; and she had two pupils in drawing, and was trying to get a few in piano music.

Edith was, evidently, the strongest character of the three. But she looked helpless, because she looked starved.

The patients had not come, and the family's needs were pressing. The remains of breakfast on the table showed it. They had had rye coffee, corn bread, and some pieces of salted fish.

The table was clean; but many of the articles which had once adorned it were seen no more. They had been changed into food and clothing. All the silver they had left was an old candlestick and a few teaspoons. The mate to that candlestick had gone to pay Mr. Selwyn's funeral expenses.

The young doctor sat with downcast eyes. His cheeks were pale and hollow, his eyes fevered. He seemed to be lingering to say something which he had not the courage to say. Their taxes were overdue,

and he had been urged to sell the place. How could he tell them! It would kill his mother to leave the house. It would also, he felt sure, ruin his own hopes. If there were any chance for him, it was in keeping a firm hold on the remains of their social standing and its outward signs. Banished to a cheap apartment on a back street, he would fall out of sight entirely.

Besides, as if his misfortunes were not already enough, the poor boy had fallen in love with Alice Blake, old Doctor Blake's granddaughter, and presumptive heiress. Then, crowning all, he was hungry.

James Martin had carried all before him in Southport. The young ladies smiled upon him, the old ladies praised him, and children were proud to be ill and have him come and pinch their cheeks, and tell them that he would have them well in less than no time. Charles Selwyn had seen him only the evening before, walking with Alice Blake in her grandfather's garden.

Mrs. Selwyn glanced at her son with an expression of dread. She had a painful, though familiar, proposition to make. Since he remained silent, she stretched out a trembling hand, and gathered up their six silver spoons. Edith understood the movement, hardened her face, and waited.

As they hung on that last instant of silence, as a heart hangs that in another moment will break, the latch of the garden gate was heard opening and shutting.

At that sound their faces changed. Mrs. Selwyn dropped the spoons from her shaking hand, the young doctor started and reddened nervously, and Edith sprang up and went to the window.

"It is Doctor Martin," she said.

The other two faces fell; but hers dwelt for a

moment with an earnest gaze on the face of their visitor.

He stood in the garden-path, looking about him. Alice Blake had said to him the evening before: "You complain that the Selwyns are ceremonious with you, and that Charles does not come to your house. Do you expect compliments from people who are starving, soul and body, and too proud to complain? I wonder they have the heart to be civil to anybody!"

And thereupon had followed a long conversation between the two, who were too good friends ever to become lovers.

The doctor was shocked at what he learned. Poor, gentle martyrs! This, then, was the meaning of their reserve! They were simply dying!

This information was like the snow that goes to increase a rolling ball.

Doctor James Martin's mind was much more burdened in those days than any one would have imagined. He seemed the gayest of the gay. Sunshine surrounded him, success crowned him, and opposition shrank before his stalwart form and bright, direct eyes. He seemed to carry a breeze with him, and to have more life than he knew how to use in his present mode of existence. He took long walks, he sawed wood, he pruned trees, and after a snowy winter's night he might have been seen at early dawn shovelling the snow off the sidewalk. When the grass began to grow, he shaved the lawn.

He had worked off a good deal of mental irritation, as well as superfluous life, in this way. At the bottom of his heart he was more than discontented; he felt that alarm, daily increasing, of one who sees himself losing some precious thing which he can never

regain. He was surfeited with flattery, and ashamed of the excess of his popularity, which made him seem to himself almost an impostor. What they admired in him was not what he knew to be admirable; and what he most earnestly knew to be best, they did not understand, or were indifferent to. They liked him because he was handsome, accomplished, agreeable, and successful: he wanted them to like his ideas.

Doctor Martin was a doctor all through, even to his shadow. He had a passion for leaving things better than he found them. But his was not that crude reforming instinct which is a moral Procrustean bed. He suggested good to bad silently, presented a better to good, and a best to better, and waited for their adoption, having faith in human nature. He did not complain if the change were gradual, since improvement might be more lasting if slowly accomplished; and he liked to see things grow.

But this Southport society was growing the wrong way. Its culture was not a development of its own character, but a veneering. Their feathers were all borrowed ones; their refinement an affectation. This pinchbeck elegance was infinitely depressing to him, and the exceptions to it were so few as to afford little consolation. Moreover, exceptions were dying out. They were chiefly old people. His own father and old Mr. Selwyn had been examples of this class.

"*Jove arcana!*" the doctor would mutter, as he tossed the snow, or sawed the wood, or cut the grass, "are all my studies and travels and aspirations to have no other end than this? — a mixing of pills and powders, and a cultivation of sham gentilities!"

He would not say it, even to himself; but his own mother and sister tried him more severely than did

any one else. His father had been wont to sing upon occasion for their benefit the old song —

Hi! Betty Martin, tip-toe, tip-toe,
Hi! Betty Martin, tip-toe fine!

and had laughed at their airs. But the old doctor had been a much more easy-going, indolent man than his son turned out to be.

"It would just suit Charlie," the young doctor thought, as he stood looking about their pleasant garden. "He is a good fellow; but he does dote on rose-water."

"What a pretty place it is!" he added.

The apple-trees were in blossom, the cherries were just dropping their bridal veils, the lilacs were beginning to open a stubborn bud here and there in the dark waxen clusters, and the rose-bushes were full of buds. From behind the house was heard the cackling of a hen. It was the only hen on the place, and the egg over which it was rejoicing would be exchanged later in the day for salt. There was a chicken also; and Patrick would carry it to market when it should have gained another half-pound of flesh. And there was a single turkey getting itself ready for Thanksgiving time, when Patrick would fight the grand battle of the year, and commit who knows how many sins of wrath, deceitfulness, perhaps of violence, in order to sell it for a high price against all competitors.

"Yes, it is a pleasant old place," said Doctor Martin. "They mustn't give it up."

Alice Blake had said to him the evening before, "I am so much afraid they will have to sell their house. If they come to that, I shall hate the human race."

Doctor Selwyn appeared, and invited his visitor to enter.

"No, I won't go in," he replied. "It is too early to ask to see any ladies but the Three Sisters. Can you give ten minutes of their and your company?"

Doctor Selwyn murmured a half audible assent, and accompanied his friend to the elm arbor. "He wants to buy the place! That is what he was looking about for!" he said to himself as he sat down.

Doctor Martin began at once. "I have come to ask a favor of you. I want to go away for a month or two to look after the property Aunt Betsey has left me; and I must have some one to attend to my sick people."

He affected not to hear the faint gasp his companion could not restrain.

"There are not many sick, as you know; but scarlet fever is appearing. Can you oblige me?"

He only glanced at his speechless friend to receive a bow of acquiescence, and went on. "I was talking with Doctor Blake last evening."

"Ah! and with Alice!" thought the listener; but he held his breath to hear what would follow.

"He is getting old. He is scarcely good for surgery any more. Why don't you cultivate him? Pardon me, Selwyn! I don't want to be intrusive or indelicate; but I remember that you used to be a little thin-skinned, and wait for people to offer you what you had better have asked for frankly. I don't know as you would wish for a partnership with Doctor Blake; but I think that you could have it. I think, too, that Alice would like it, if that would make any difference."

Another gasp.

"If you don't look sharp," Doctor Martin went on, "some other fellow may step in. Of course the doctor is crabbed, and would be like a pair of splints to

you. But he can't live forever; and you can have it all your own way by and by."

"Thank you!" murmured Selwyn in a trembling voice.

Doctor Martin looked studiously away from him as he went on. "You mustn't mind my calling you thin-skinned. It is a condition of a fine organization, I suppose. But it doesn't serve a person whose circumstances forbid his keeping himself wrapped up in pink cotton all the time. Look at my brother-in-law now. He is the most successful lawyer in Southport, and will be a judge. Yet the greatest gift he has is push. I don't mean to under-rate him. His head is a flint; but he has a kind heart. He cried when poor father died; and he never lets a day go by without coming in to see how mother gets along. He is more comfort to her than I am. But, for all that, he doesn't care whom he nudges when it is a question of getting on."

"I am afraid that push isn't a Selwyn virtue," the young man answered in a tone which betrayed something like resentment. With the prospect of a change of fortune, his dignity began to assert itself anew. Already his poverty and suffering were lifting themselves like a mist, and moving away into forgetfulness.

Then, suddenly, he realized his seeming ingratitude and positive ungraciousness.

"I thank you, Martin!" he said with emotion, and held his hand out. "It is true, I was always a sort of girl. Of course I need this help, and I am more thankful than I can tell you. As for Doctor Blake, I couldn't imagine a better fortune than to have him take me in."

The visitor rose promptly. "All right, then! I will come for you this afternoon at three o'clock."

"I have done a stupid thing!" he thought as he went away. "I gave him a favor dipped in gall. I declare, I didn't mean to lecture him. It was a miserable mistake!"

Charles Selwyn returned to the house, wondering how he could ever have been discouraged.

Mrs. Selwyn was washing dishes in the kitchen when she heard her son enter the next room, and immediately after the voice of Edith exclaiming, "Why, Charles! what is the matter?"

Smitten with a fainting sense of some crowning misfortune, the mother supported herself for an instant against the table before her, then went with a staggering step to the sitting-room. Edith had half risen from her chair, holding with both hands her lapful of sewing. Her brother stood swinging his cap about, his face very red, and unmistakably joyous.

His story was told in a dozen words.

"Oh!" cried Edith, letting her work fall. "Oh! mother, Charlie, was there ever another man like that!"

Mrs. Selwyn turned silently, and sank on her knees before a chair, covering her face with her hands.

A few minutes later the garden gate opened again, and Patrick appeared. The young doctor called out to him from the window: "Patrick, kill and pick that turkey right away, so that we can have it for dinner."

"Is it the turkey, sir?" asked Patrick, stupefied.

"Yes: it's the turkey, sir," replied Selwyn.

Patrick went off with a wondering mind toward the poultry yard.

This startling order recalled Mrs. Selwyn from her thanksgiving. She rose, wiping her eyes. "Wouldn't it be better to have the chicken,

Charles?" she asked, strong in her habit of economy.

"Come to think of it, we will have them both," he replied; and, going to the window again, called out: "Patrick, kill the chicken too."

"Is it the turkey and the chicken both, sir?" asked Patrick, doubting his own senses.

A happy half-hour passed in planning; and they had already made a fortune, paid their debts, and renovated the house and the whole place, when Patrick's voice was heard at the kitchen door: "Here's the turkey, sir, and the chicken, sir!"

CHAPTER IX.

TO PERRY'S.

Doctor Martin set out to visit his township, making a journey very different from that made to the same place nowadays. A sail of seven hours in a little steamboat brought him to a pleasant town on the Penobscot River. From there, a yellow coach and four horses took him to Shepherdsville, a pretty village at the head of a bay. Thence the only conveyance was a two-seated open wagon, drawn by a pair of farm-horses. This was Perry's stage; and it only made the trip to and from Beechlands once a week, passing over a road that led straight northward through a heavily wooded country, to the owner's farm. Beyond this farm was the doctor's township; and beyond the township was an unknown wild country, with a Heath farm as the *ultima Thule* of civilization. Everything which the scattered population along this thirty miles of road had to buy was purchased at Shepherdsville, the greater part of it by the stage-driver; and this responsible office had been filled by three generations of Perrys.

In this region the forest swarmed with deer. Bears were sometimes seen, and wolves more rarely; but their growl and howl, and the fox's bark were frequent sounds in the wild orchestra about Beechlands. The brooks were full of trout, and the fields of birds. All these creatures, undisturbed hitherto, as far as the knowledge of man went, while shrinking

backward, still crept to the borders of their violated domain to watch with a shy fascination the approach of the inevitable destroyer.

Doctor Martin slept at Shepherdsville, having learned that he could proceed the next day at eight o'clock.

"What hour do you mean by eight o'clock?" he asked of the landlord of the Shepherdsville Arms, while eating his solitary breakfast.

"Eight o'clock," said the landlord solemnly, "means seven o'clock and sixty minutes."

"Then I have only fifteen minutes," remarked the traveller, consulting his watch.

The landlord glanced at a tall clock in a corner of the dining-room. "You have fourteen minutes and a half," he said. "Perry divides the dot. He's most harnessed now."

The doctor went out in search of this model of promptness, and found a young man harnessing a pair of dull bays to a wagon. He was a tolerably good-looking fellow, clad in a blue home-spun suit, a straw hat, and oiled boots. He glanced at the stranger, returned with some reluctance the cheerful "Good-morning!" and went on with what he would have called his "tackling" without taking any further notice of him.

"Is this Perry's stage?" the doctor asked.

Without looking at him, the man replied briefly, "It is!"

"Who is Perry?" pursued the doctor.

The young man waited till he had deliberately buckled a strap before answering. "There are two. I am one, and my father's t'other."

"Do you drive the stage?" asked the doctor, who never lacked information for want of questioning.

"I drive the stage."

"I am Doctor Martin. I suppose you knew my Aunt Betsey. I am going up to look at the place. I went there once when I was a boy, and thought it the finest place in the world."

There was no reply.

"Do you own the stage, or is it owned here?" asked the doctor.

"The stage is ours."

Young Mr. Perry pronounced the word "aours;" but as his speech was decent, and whereas few persons pronounce perfectly their native language, we will not insist on these little peculiarities.

"The horses are yours, too?"

"The horses are ours," the young man replied firmly, tightening a girth with decision as he spoke.

"I suppose they pay you something for carrying the mail?" the questioner pursued.

"I reckon they do!" said the driver grimly.

It was eight o'clock. The two men mounted the wagon and set out. There was a few minutes' pause at the post-office, where a thin leather bag, directed to "Four Corners," was brought out; then they continued their journey. The commissions had all been executed, and the boxes under the seats were full of parcels.

"I have forgotten about Four Corners," the doctor said, as they jogged out into the woody country. "How many miles this side of Beechlands is it?"

"Five mile and a half."

The traveller sighed, and gave up for a time all hope of conversation. Seated behind the driver, he examined the country through which they were passing with that interest which can be felt only by those who are able to compare their own with foreign coun-

tries. The first thing that attracted his attention was the superior grace of American trees. Nowhere had he seen forests so beautiful. Then came a shrinking from the ugliness of the dwellings, the almost universal lack of taste in whatever man had touched. Lastly, an appalling sense of general wastefulness grew upon him. Tracts of land burnt over and left a desert of white stones, and wide fields populated with ugly stumps, where forests had been annihilated, as though oaks grew in a night, like mushrooms, and a group of royal beeches were a trifle!

"They have no sense of a future!" he thought indignantly. "They don't know the first element of agriculture nor of beauty."

Then some solid mass of forest would shut him in with its soothing shadows; here, a blackness that the eye could not pierce; and there, quivering with glints and flashes of golden sunshine, where that spark of infinite life — which was Jupiter — sought and showered with heavenly riches the waiting terrestrial bosom — that was Danäe!

Toward three o'clock they reached "Four Corners," a miniature village built at the intersection of two roads. Here were a white meeting-house on an elm-shaded green, half a dozen dwellings, a blacksmith's shop, and a store, which was also the post-office. On the arrival of the mail, the letters and papers were all spread out on the counter, and everybody selected his own.

In a back-room the store-keeper, or his wife, was in the habit of receiving mysterious visits, to the stern disapproval of one half of their neighbors, and the ingenuous ignorance of the other. These visitors dropped in, in a casual manner, often with a mournful, abstracted expression of countenance.

Mr. Perry drew up his horses with as much of a flourish as they were capable of displaying, and delivered the mail-bag to a man who appeared to receive it. Already there had begun a slow concentration of men at the store, and the windows of the houses were adorned with female heads. One man descended from a rail fence, perched on which he had been waiting for the stage; the bald-headed doctor came from his white cottage across the street; the solemn minister from his two-story house beside the church; and lastly, there appeared a handsome Spanish-looking gentleman, for whom everybody made way.

This gentleman touched his hat to the stranger, at which the doctor and the minister saluted. For the others, it would seem that their idea of propriety was to elaborately ignore his presence.

On renewing acquaintance with his countrymen, nothing had amused our traveller more than this affected indifference which, he well knew, covered a consuming curiosity.

"We are the most affected people in the world," he thought. "The small distinguished percentage apart, nothing is so difficult for an American as to be himself."

The Spanish-looking gentleman, who, in spite of his looks, was a New-Englander, talked with the minister. Doctor Pennel stood somewhat jealously apart, and waited to be noticed by them. The others looked on respectfully. An almost royal etiquette surrounded the minister, Mr. Wilder. Hats were taken off in salutation; but no one spoke to him until he had been spoken to. Only Mr. Haslem, the rich lumberman, and a city gentleman, besides, could take such a liberty.

Doctor Martin waited a moment in vain for some

one to be conscious of his presence; then stepped out of the wagon, and seeing Doctor Pennel quite neglected, approached him.

"You are, perhaps, a physician," he said. "I see a doctor's sign on the door opposite." And he introduced himself.

His reception was a glowing one. Everybody in that region had known Miss Elizabeth Martin; and all who had talked much with her had heard of her nephew. She had read his letters to the doctor, the minister and Mr. Haslem, and shown his ambrotype to everybody. People had come from far and near to look with wonder and suspicion at the braided Palm-Sunday branches he had sent her from Italy, and to admire the bits of marbles and alabasters that had come to her from over the seas.

Miss Betsey Martin might have sighed with contentment in dying, could she have known how her name would be spoken where she so long had lived. They had known her for many years; and for them she had not been good in vain. While he listened to their serious, appreciative words, her nephew felt that she had made a place for him, and that he was among friends.

It is, perhaps, the greatest merit of any society that goodness and greatness are not thrown away on it; and when they are so wasted, does not the holy Scripture justify us in calling them swine?

A blushing young woman in a gay muslin gown and starched petticoats made her somewhat flustered progress to the stage, and was helped to the front seat by an attendant swain. She was going to visit a friend farther up the road.

At the same time, the stage-driver, who, the doctor found, was generally called Isaac, or Ike, made his

appearance from the room behind the post-office, where he had spent the interval of waiting. The face he brought out of this retreat was very different from that which he had carried in, redder in color, and more agreeable in expression. One perceived also an odor about him which was as the odor of rum.

It could not have been rum, however: for Martha Washington was abroad in the land, and only when furnished with a doctor's certificate that he was a very sick man, could Isaac have lawfully obtained a glass of any spirituous liquor.

Nor was this phenomenal change of color and expression peculiar to the stage-driver. The same happened every day to at least a dozen other men, sometimes even to Doctor Pennel; and there was one man who went in so many times a day, getting redder and more jovial every time, that the stern, pale-blooded minister, encountering him on one of his exits, openly accused him of being in a suspicious condition.

"All right, parshon!" he replied, becoming instantly and intensely solemn. "Got my shtifkit; 'shpepshy!"

Isaac, having regained his seat, snapped his whip, looked at Dr. Martin and winked facetiously.

The doctor took leave of his new acquaintances, and they pursued their journey, Isaac and the young woman in front conversing volubly, their companion asking himself why the conviction that he was a hero at Four Corners pleased him, while to be a hero at Southport was an annoyance.

He found the reason somewhat far away. The religious instincts in these men were yet spiritual and uncompromising, and their hero-worship was a looking up without grovelling. They admired, standing erect the while. To them, worldly prosperity was most

probably the result of personal superiority or ancestral dignity; and where they gave respect they presupposed moral worth. They had not learned to disguise as charity a secret sympathy with evil-doing, nor to become the accomplices of vice under the fair shield of prudence.

The doctor could imagine how their faces would freeze to him if they believed him to be dishonest, whatever his prosperity might be.

The stage stopped before a little red house set down like a bird-cage in a green hollow. Isaac had bought knitting-needles, spool-thread, a hoe, and some rice for the young couple who came down to the bars to receive them, and to chat with him and Melissa a few minutes.

"By George, you have courage!" exclaimed the doctor, regarding the farmer and his wife with admiration. "What do you hope to do with that land?" pointing to a field almost snow-white with rocks, where a few patches of corn dotted the waste.

The young farmer looked at him with a certain one-eyed expression, which he would himself have described as "'cute."

"You come here three years from now," he said, "and you will see grass and clover that you could swim in where them rocks are."

"Sir," said the doctor, "I take off my hat to you!" suiting the action to the word.

They drove on to the next farm, already visible to them through a strip of birch woods. Here Melissa of the starch and blushes was to stop on a visit to her friend, Sarah Jane Brown. "And there is Sarah Jane now," she cried excitedly.

Through the last lace-like birches a group was visible in the door of the house; and instantly a young woman

detached herself from it and hastened down the path to the bars to meet her visitor. An elderly woman, with a tiny child holding a fold of her skirt, followed, and an awkward hobbledehoy lounged from one foot to the other in the rear, bashfully divided between his mother's command to advance and his fear of encountering strangers. The same hesitation seemed to possess a man who had been hoeing in the garden.

The two young women gazed at each other from a distance, their faces bursting with joy; and then came a rush into each other's arms, followed by two resounding kisses.

"Oh, Melissa, you don't know how tickled I be to see you!" cried one; and "You ain't no tickleder'n I be!" responded the other.

The boy was grinning from ear to ear. The elder woman welcomed her guest with an air which the doctor found stately. She was Roman-nosed, wore glasses and did not smile, which, in contrast to the others, made her look severe. Her voice, too, was cultivated, if somewhat arrogant in tone, and her language was good. Mrs. Brown was, in fact, writhing over the rustic expressions used by her daughter in the hearing of this distinguished-looking gentleman. He had taken off his hat to them all, and Mrs. Brown had courtesied to him, the others merely smiling broadly. He had observed during his whole journey that country people did not appear to think a salutation deserving of an acknowledgment, even when they showed themselves pleased by it.

Isaac began to hand over a number of parcels to "Miss" Brown, who consigned them one by one to her son. "Here's yer pound of green tea, and here's yer two pound of loaf-sugar, and here's yer pound of castile soap and yer two ounces of nutmegs. Here's

yer box of blackin', and here's yer factory cotton, and two spools of cotton number fifty, and a paper of Sharp's needles, five to ten."

Mrs. Brown examined the list and paid for the articles in English and Spanish silver, reckoning them as shillings and pence. "Here's yer *Portland Transcript*," the driver pursued, "and yer *Augusta Age*," handing over two papers. "And here," turning to Sarah Jane, and speaking with slow and solemn emphasis, "here's a letter from yer beau!"

"Oh! you get out!" exclaimed Sarah Jane, blushing and giggling as she received the letter.

Mrs. Brown looked severely at her daughter, and, catching her glance, conveyed such an arrow of silent reproof as put a stop to the giggling, and restored Sarah Jane to temporary propriety.

The doctor had tried to make acquaintance with the youngest child, a pretty girl of four years; but she only stared at him out of two bright eyes, as blue as sapphires, and kept her rosebud of a mouth closely shut.

"Why don't you answer the gentleman, Eliza Ann?" her sister said.

She pronounced the name Lizerann.

The driver mounted to his seat, Mrs. Brown courtesied, the young woman bowed, and the doctor raised his hat. They were about to start, when Sarah Jane had a sudden flash of recollection.

"Where are the English stockings?" she asked.

Isaac's face changed. "By gracious, I forgot 'em!" he ejaculated, and, lifting both hands, let them drop heavily at either side.

"Oh, Ike, how could you?" cried the girl, and stood looking at him the picture of dismay.

"I vow, I forgot 'em!" repeated Isaac, with a crestfallen look; and bent to gather up the reins.

"What shall I do?" murmured Sarah Jane tragically, tears gathering in her eyes.

"I declare, now, I forgot 'em," said Isaac again, evidently much distressed; and gave his whip a feeble swing over the tails of his horses.

Feeble as the hint was, they started, as unerringly scenting their near stalls and hay-mow as the war-horse scents the far battle. Sarah Jane went to the house supported and comforted by Melissa.

"It's the first time I ever saw a woman cry for a pair of stockings," the doctor remarked.

"She's goin' to be married Monday," said Isaac moodily, his head sunk forward on his breast.

"They was her weddin' stockin's," he added, after a pause.

They drove on in silence for a time, their road ploughing into the superb forest again.

"Sarah Jane is a first-rate girl," said the driver at length, rousing himself from a gloomy revery. "She isn't stuck-up, like her mother."

"Mrs. Brown is a lady," said his passenger. "Who is she? How did she come here?"

As he had assumed a defensive tone with regard to the lady, the driver showed signs of continuing the offensive: "She came here because she married Tom Brown. Tom Brown was born here, an' b'longs here."

The doctor said nothing.

"Her father was Major John Cameron, of Shepherdsville," Isaac continued more mildly. "They are big-feelin' folks, but mighty poor."

The sun was sinking toward the west, and grotesque shadows of the two men were projected in advance of them as they jogged along. From Four Corners their road was partly eastward. The trees rustled softly, with a sound like waves breaking on a sandy beach.

The doctor was thinking of his aunt, remembering with a pensive tenderness the time when he, a child, had passed this way, with her by his side. What good company she was to children as well as to their elders! The driver also was lost in revery, which seemed anything but joyous.

Presently they came to a wide clearing with a great log farm-house in the midst. This was "Perry's," the termination of stage-travel.

Isaac roused himself with a sigh, and gave the reins a shake.

"I'm sorry I forgot them stockin's!" he remarked, betraying the subject of his musings.

The people in that part of the country were just beginning to build frame-houses in place of the original log ones; and the Perrys had with their own hands put up a small addition to their house. It was the stranger's quarter, and contained two rooms. It was an alien-looking structure, the walls a little crooked, and the windows uneven. In contrast to the brown logs beside it, it looked like a flower in a button-hole. Its clap-boards were washed a brilliant white, its door painted a lively green, and the window-sashes red. It showed that natural love of color we laugh at at home and admire abroad.

"Perry's" was a rough, live, disorderly place. The large barn was bursting with hay, the house was gay with tow-headed, freckled boys and girls, the orchard had a hundred gnarled old apple-trees, the large back yard was surrounded by piles of fire-wood, and paved with chips. In the midst of these chips sat the elder Perry, filing a wood-saw with a sound to set one's teeth on edge.

Two rough boys ran to let the bars down at the approach of the stage, and the saw-filer sat with file

suspended. Mrs. Perry, a painfully ugly but good soul, seeing that her son had a passenger, ran to smooth her disordered hair and pull down her tucked-up sleeves. Amanda Perry, a long-legged, ambitious girl of fifteen, came out to the door-step; and there was something in the dimness of the entry behind her which resembled a carnival mask with a white frill around it.

This was grandmother Perry, eighty-five years old. She was becoming a little silly, and her prominent nose and chin, associated with a toothless and ever-smiling mouth, made her unbeautiful to a high degree. She did not smile the less because she was always kept in the background, and seemed quite unaware of any deficiencies in herself or others.

The green door of the frame-house was opened from the inside with a sound of bolts, and Mrs. Perry welcomed the stranger cordially when she did not know who he was, and enthusiastically when she did. She had known Miss Martin all her life, and remembered perfectly the little boy who had come to Beechlands with her one summer. Why, he had given Isaac his jackknife when he went away! Didn't he remember Isaac?

All the family stood looking in at the parlor door while this welcoming conversation was going on; and the doctor was rather glad to escape into the bedroom to which he was presently shown.

"It's the school-mistress's bedroom," Mrs. Perry said; "but she's gone down to Four Corners to spend the Sabbath with the Haslem girls, and won't be back till Monday morning. I'll fix up the other room for you before that. I don't suppose you'll stay with Mis' Winter, seein' she's all alone."

Mrs. Winter was the keeper of the doctor's house;

and as she was an old woman, and about going away, he did not mean to give her the trouble of entertaining him.

The bedroom to which he had been shown gave a very good impression of the school-mistress. It was clean, and full of tasteful devices for order and convenience in a small space. It showed a love of nature in bits of moss, beautiful lichens, and airy bouquets of grass-blossoms. The same hand was also visible in the parlor, where a cornice of oak leaves, pinned together with thorns, ran around the white-washed walls.

"She must be like poor Aunt Betsey," the doctor thought. "Aunt Betsey always did that sort of thing." And he was prepared to be very friendly with the school-mistress.

Supper was served in the parlor in honor of the visitor; a New England country supper of that time, delicious and suicidal. Of course Mrs. Perry accompanied the whole with a running fire of apologies, declaring that nothing was fit to eat, and that she was afraid the doctor would starve.

His secret and fervent prayer was that he might not spend the night in a protracted nightmare after the succession of sweets, cream, butter and coffee that he was compelled to swallow.

He escaped at length to his bedroom, and, blowing out the candle, sat down at the open window to look for the North star and wait for sleep.

The sounds of human life grew still, and the forest sounds stole in to take their place. The doors were quietly closed, but no key turned; the windows all remained open. Trustfulness and security were in the air.

A white-rose bush grew outside the window, and

from time to time a sweet breath of its perfume reached the watcher. It came mingled with the first whispering foam of the deep sea of sleep. Fragmentary foreign memories began to mingle with present scenes in that unreasoning half-consciousness where everything finds place. A little turquoise ring came, and after it floated a pretty Italian letter of thanks, written in painstaking, delicate characters.

Beatrice had received her ring with a rapture which the giver could have no idea of, and which did not transpire in her letter, though it rippled with *issimi;* and she had spent days and used many sheets of highly ceremonious paper before completing it to her own approval and that of the family.

"Poor little girl!" said the doctor, rousing himself. "I wonder what sets me thinking of her! I must go to bed. I suppose she is about getting up."

CHAPTER X.

IN THE LAURELS.

Beatrice was awake in that far-away home of hers. She had scarcely slept all night; for a supreme experience awaited her that day. She was going to Sanzio and to see Palazzo Giorgini for the first time since, as a child, she had left them. This last part of the day's adventure was a secret between her and Betta.

Aldegonda Mattei's mother-in-law was going to Sanzio to make some purchases. She was to be accompanied by Betta, and had offered to take Beatrice.

"The child so seldom goes anywhere," she urged, when asking the Signora Alinori's permission.

"Oh! she may go, and welcome," the signora replied tartly. "I am more than willing to be relieved one day from the necessity of looking after her."

"Looking after her!" echoed the other in surprise.

"Wait till you see her smiling at every gentleman she meets!" said the Alinori. "She's a perfect coquette. I have made up my mind to send her to the Signora Anna."

The Signora Mattei smiled, but made no comment. Her thought was — "I should like to see you giving up the child's pension, and her piano, and various other articles that would have to go with her!"

The Signora Anna was the old Countess Alinori.

Beginning to feel the heavy weight of years, and the need of having some young and active person ever beside her, she had more than once proposed to re-

ceive Beatrice as companion. Beatrice would save her the expense of another servant, and be just as useful, perhaps more so.

Besides, she had always had an uneasy feeling about the girl, and believed that the more closely they kept her under their own control and observation the better it would be for their interests. The fate of Paulo and the conduct of his mother toward his daughter had always been a weight on her mind.

Why had her sister-in-law allowed Beatrice Lanciani to remain in even an obscure corner of her palace, if she did not believe that she was Paulo's wife, or that he had deceived her by a false marriage? Why had she kept the child there, and visited her secretly as long as she lived, if she did not at least doubt that she might be Paulo's legitimate heiress? What was the word that she struggled in vain to pronounce in dying? Charity did not account for it all. Emilia Giorgini was charitable to the poor, and to sinners who did not soil her skirts, but implacably stern to whatever reflected on her own honor.

As she thought over these things, a secret terror seized her of what might happen in the future to her soul, or to her family. She was afraid that the child's mother had been deceived. Francesco's wife, who willingly believed everything evil that was told her, never doubted that the child was an outcast; and when the young eyes, hungry for affection, turned to every face that seemed to meet them kindly, her opinion of the mother's character aided her natural coarseness in putting a low interpretation on that pathetic look.

"So she is jealous of the child," thought the Mattei, and laughed inwardly as she turned away to tell Beatrice the result of her intercession.

Betta had already spoken to the girl, and privately arranged the second and most important part of their expedition. Her sister Maria was still housekeeper at Palazzo Giorgini; and from her she knew all the movements of the family. The Count and Countess had gone into the country for a few days. Don Giovanni had been ill, and his anxious wife was going to try change of air for him. The other servants would accompany them to the villa, and Maria alone remain to guard the palace. Betta had arranged that she and Beatrice should enter by the secret door through the apartment where Paulo had taken his wife on their marriage. She did not fear any disapproval on the Signora Mattei's part, but thought better not to tell her their plan till after it should have been accomplished.

Beatrice knew her mother's story and her own, and she was intelligent enough to pretend to be ignorant of them.

"Your only hope is in seeming not to know who you are, and in making them think that you are contented with your lot," the Signora Mattei would whisper to her.

"Don't let them see that you know, not for your life!" said Betta. "Remember what happened to your father!"

"Do you think that *they* did it?" asked Beatrice, when first she heard the story.

They were in the villa of the advocate Randini, her father's friend; and she pointed her question at the villa Alinori adjoining.

"Oh, no, dear! not directly," Betta had answered, soothingly; "but they profit by it."

"Who did it?" persisted the girl.

"I do not know," said Betta. "I cannot guess. But I think that Lo Zoppo could tell something."

"I will ask him when he comes again!" exclaimed the girl.

Betta caught her by the arm. "You are a little fool! Do you think that he will tell you anything? He would go straight to the signora and tell her every word you had said, and ask her what you mean."

"He comes here to reap grain, and he carries the wine to Sanzio," Beatrice said. "The Signor Leonardo hates him."

"He does!" said Betta. "Why?"

"He says that he is always begging. But the Signor Leonardo hates me, too. I heard him ask the signora once what she kept that brat in the house for."

"And what did she answer?" asked Betta, who was listening very intently.

"She laughed," said Beatrice, "and said that she had taken me with the intention of pleasing him. What did she mean, Betta?"

"Who knows!" replied Betta carelessly. She had not told the child that part of her mother's story which related to Don Leonardo.

For two years now, Beatrice had known who she was; and at length she was to see the palace of her father, of which she was the rightful mistress! What dreams she had had! What wild plans she had laid to regain her forfeited inheritance! What ambition and hatred had grown up in her heart, side by side! And what a power of concealing both had she acquired in those years of silence and subjection! One charm of the turquoise ring the kind stranger had sent her was that it seemed a tribute to her proper state. Those about her would have given her an apron, or a handkerchief, "a servant's present!" she thought scornfully.

Unable to rest from excitement, Beatrice rose early on the day of her proposed visit. The family were at their villa, and she went out before the sun was up, and wandered about the grounds. Only the work-people were abroad. Some men were beating the grain with flails on a circle of stone pavement in the field. She went to watch them a few minutes, then passed on to a clump of laurel trees near the hedge which divided the land of the Alinori from that of their neighbor. At the other side of the hedge two men were binding up straw. These were Lo Zoppo and one of his sons, now a young man. Other men were working farther off on the advocate Randini's land, and the advocate himself had come out from town to oversee them for a few days, and breathe the pure country air. He had always been in the habit of making these brief visits to his villa, even in the winter, as Beatrice's father was aware when he accepted that secret invitation of which no one knew the result.

Beatrice walked to the laurel-grove and looked through the hedge. There was a break in it, made long years before, to enable the advocate's men to reach a well among the laurels. It had once been a perennial well of fresh, cool water, used on both villas; but the digging of wells lower down had drawn off its waters, which at length dried entirely, and the discovery of a nest of vipers in its upper stone-work had completed its ruin. Being suspected then, as well as no longer needed, it was roughly closed with planks and brush-wood. In addition to these, the laurels had sent their roots out across it, and earth and turf were gathering there and slowly hiding that it had ever been a well.

This had all happened before Beatrice's birth; but

the hole in the hedge had continued to be used in passing from one villa to the other.

The girl liked this dusky spot under the thick laurels. It was a privacy, and a post of observation at the same time. Besides, the leaves were used for coronets. She began to make her a coronet of them this morning, selecting the smaller leaves, and trying it on her head to measure the length. A thought grew in her mind as she wove the glossy green together. She would carry it to Sanzio, and crown herself with it in her own palace.

While she stood there, the rising sun struck through the grove, and set a shower of firefly lights dancing about her. They showed that she was beginning to be pretty, and that she was now beautiful for the moment. For her head was proudly raised, her eyes shining and steady, and a faint smile from the depth of her heart made her mouth sweet. She was fifteen years of age.

A rustling sound made her start and look up from the leaves she was binding. Lo Zoppo and his son had approached the opening in the hedge, and were looking at her. The father always stared at her, as if fascinated, whenever he met her. He was more pallid and anxious-looking than ever, and his hair was almost white. He was a smileless man, and his pale blue eyes had something wild in their steady look.

"Good-morning!" said Beatrice, half frightened. "Are you coming in here?"

The old man muttered a return to her salutation; but as he did not seem disposed to say anything more, his son answered for him. "No, we're only passing by."

He moved on, and his father took a step to go, then turned again. "I wouldn't stay in the laurels," he said in a low, hoarse voice.

"Oh! I like them!" said Beatrice brightly. Her heart palpitated as she stood looking at him. Did he want to speak to her? Would he tell her anything?

He went away another step, then came back again. "I wouldn't stay in the laurels," he repeated. "There's a hole there you might fall into. And there were vipers once."

He stared into her face with his pale eyes.

"Well, I will go away," she said hastily; and hiding her wreath under her apron, she uttered a tremulous *Addio!* and ran down the slope.

Looking back from the hollow near the house, she could see that he must have left the place as quickly as she, for he was far away with his son, binding up straw, seeming to bind sunbeams as the morning light illumined the fields.

The laurel-wreath was pinned to her petticoat under the pink lawn dress she wore, a lace veil was fastened over her dark braids; and Beatrice drove into town with the Signor Alinori, or Signor Francesco, as he was oftener called, and always called by her. She was on rather pleasant terms with him. His wife said that she flattered him, though the flattery consisted only in smiling when he appeared, and being very attentive to his words and wishes. Francesco, the son, was now studying law in Rome. Perhaps the father seemed more like the son than the mother did, to the eyes of Francesco's adorer.

There was a carriage standing at the *portone* of Palazzo Mattei when they arrived there; and soon the excited young traveller was off on the pleasant road to Sanzio.

"Why! how it does please you, Bice!" said the Signora Mattei, smiling. "I wish I had brought you before."

"Is it the very same road, Betta?" asked the child.

Then Betta went over again the story of that drive eleven years before, and described the Americans minutely, all but the doctor. "You know how he looks," she said.

"Yes," said Beatrice, smiling at the ring on her finger. "He looks like a capuchin monk. That is, his beard does."

Of course, before they reached Sanzio, the Signora Mattei knew of their proposed visit to Palazzo Giorgini, and gave her friendly sympathy. "Poor child!" she said, patting the little girl's head. "It is a shame that you should have to creep in and steal a sight of your own."

They waited till the whole town was silent with its afternoon sleep: then, making many a turn, approached the private door of that apartment where the tragedy of poor Beatrice Giorgini's life had been consummated. The door had been unlocked for them and they went in.

"Lock the door after you, Betta," said a voice from the head of the stairs. "How long you have been. I've had a luncheon waiting for you this hour or more."

Maria, Betta's sister, led them at once to a small dining-room, where a table was prepared for them.

But Beatrice, trembling and breathless, would not sit down. She declared that it was impossible for her to eat. She only wanted to see the house. Let them sit down, and leave her to wander about.

She had already exacted a promise from Betta that, once shown the way, she should be left to go about the house by herself. "And I will not sit down to eat with servants *here!*" she thought.

They showed her up and down stairs, through long corridors and secret ways, through a suite of state rooms and the chapel, and through sleeping-rooms and dressing-rooms that seemed to her a labyrinth. Here the "Tessa" of her infancy had slept and died; and this was the children's play-room, and this the dowager's apartment. And lastly, she went back to see the little apartment where she was born, and her mother had died.

She gave but a glance at this humble corner of the palace, passed by unknowing the window where her father had received the fatal letter, and by which he had gone out never to return, and hastened back to the state rooms.

"Now open the doors as if there were a grand ball, Betta," Beatrice said, taking unconsciously a tone of command. "And then you go away and eat, and talk with your sister; and don't come for me for two hours. You said I might have two hours all to myself."

"If there's a ball, you must eat in the green room," said Betta. "And I will myself bring your luncheon there, Signora Beatrice Giorgini."

The child's face flushed up and her eyes filled with tears on hearing herself called for the first time by her rightful name; but she said nothing. Walking into the banqueting room, she seated herself there and waited to be served.

"Ought we to let her stay alone?" whispered the sister to Betta as they went away.

"Of course! She won't hurt anything," said Betta, who had not the fear of the Countess Maria before her eyes, and to whom Beatrice had always seemed a princess in disguise.

She returned with the luncheon on a tray, set it on one of the marble tables, and Beatrice ate it, while

Betta served her in silence. She was impressed by the intense, still excitement of the girl's face, and by something haughty and resolute in her air, which she had never seen there before.

"Now leave me alone," said Beatrice.

She was alone. Standing in the door of a chamber hung with fine old arras, she heard Betta's step going up a distant stair, heard for a moment a murmur of voices: then all was silent. For a brief two hours she was mistress of her own palace.

She walked through the long and stately suite of chambers, glancing about her at pictures, draperies, and marbles, and up at lofty painted ceilings. For the first time in her life she seemed to breathe fully. She looked at herself in the long mirrors, and seated herself in the great gold and crimson chairs. There was a chair with a red silk canopy at one end of the chief *salon*. It was a cardinal's chair, bought for a Giorgini of a past generation who had arrived at the purple. She had heard of it, and Betta had said that no one ever occupied that chair, and no one must, unless some cardinal should come to Palazzo Giorgini. There was a red silk cord tied across it, from arm to arm. Beatrice tore the cord away, and seated herself in the chair. Anger was growing in her at sight of all of which she had been robbed. She wished that she could give her commands to some one, give them arrogantly; and seeing a bell-rope that hung near by, moved her hand with the intention of giving it a violent pull. The thought that the two women would come if she did restrained her.

Rising then, she went to the chapel, and after listening a moment, locked herself in.

The chapel was a small chamber on the drawing-room floor, simply prepared for the sacred service,

with a paper partition and double doors before the altar, and a few chairs and kneeling benches. The doors before the altar were open, showing a softly beaming Madonna and Child above, and a sanctuary lamp lighted.

Beatrice mechanically bent her knee and blessed herself, then began to search. She knew the last words spoken by the old countess; and though Betta had said that she herself, while the countess was dying, had searched the chapel from floor to ceiling, there had always lingered a faint hope of some discovery which should change her fortunes. She searched the altar itself now, lifting the heavy candlesticks, and creeping even underneath and behind. She lifted the carpet, though it must have been raised a thousand times since the old woman's death. She searched the one small table there, and her heart leaped as she saw a letter in the drawer.

She opened it with trembling fingers and read, though the letter was but a few days old:

BEST CONTESSA MARIA: The doctor assures me that he was quite sincere with you, and that Giovanni's sickness is not serious. He says that his very lack of mental activity is in his favor, his constitution being excellent. Give yourself no uneasiness. The Giorgini have been a long-lived race. Within a hundred years four of them have exceeded ninety years, and ten have lived to be more than eighty. My greatest fear is that Giovanni may outlive his excellent wife. Take care of yourself as well as of him. I predict twenty or thirty years longer for him.

Yours devotedly,
ANDREA OF ANCONA.

It was the superior of the capuchins, whose convent near by furnished the countess with a confessor and a chaplain.

"If he should live thirty years longer I shall be forty-five years old when he dies," reckoned the girl, putting the letter in its place again. "What shall I care about anything then! Besides, his death makes no difference. If it is mine, it is mine now!"

She stood there in an anguish of longing. For two years a wild sweet dream had been hers. She saw herself mistress of name and wealth, not for herself, but that she might give them to Francesco Alinori. He had been promised to the daughter of a rich farmer. Let him marry her, if he liked, and make a countess of her. He did not love her, and her portion would be nothing beside the Giorgini money. True, Checco might one day have it all without her help, if his Uncle Tommaso should have no son. There were only girls as yet; and if he should die before Giovanni — but that was not likely. Giovanni dead, and Tommaso in Sanzio, there was no more hope for Francesco except through her.

"I would tell him," she dreamed aloud, "that he might marry whom he liked, but everything would be his the same. Would he smile? Of course! Would he take it? I would make him take it. Perhaps he would do as Alfonso Lelli did when Augusta Merimi gave him a rose! It was beautiful!"

She silently contemplated the scene of this rose-giving, when Alfonso had dropped on his knee to kiss the maiden's hand, calling her "*fanciulla adorata.*"

"Perhaps he might say that he would marry me!" she whispered, softly and happily smiling at the thought. To have her hand kissed and to be called "maiden adored" by Francesco Alinori was to be wrapped in the rosy cloud of the immortals, and lifted above the rough earth.

She stood in the little chapel and imagined him

kneeling before her with his lustrous eyes uplifted, his curling locks within reach of her hand! Such beautiful eyes! Such soft thick waves of bright hair! Her head swam as the vision formed itself and grew vivid; her breath was oppressed. She staggered, and, recovering herself, looked about, and realized where she was and what she was — a poor nameless girl visiting secretly a house from which she would be driven with contempt if the mistress should return unawares. If Francesco Alinori were there he would lift no adoring eyes to her. A careless nod or smile was the best that she could hope for from him. A blush of terror overspread her face at the possibility that he should ever know what vision her fancy had conjured up. Tears of rage and despair filled her eyes, and she began to search again with a fiercer energy.

Once more every nook of the chapel was searched. She even mounted the altar, and, taking down the picture of the Madonna, looked at the back of it. "There is nothing!" she said at last in despair. "If there ever was anything here, they have stolen it. They knew what grandmamma said, and of course they have left nothing unsearched. Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

She opened the door, and went out into the reception rooms again, curiosity helping to soothe her passion. These rooms were furnished in the old style, and were some of them fine. The painted ceilings were ugly when looked at: one feared those heavy gods and horses and vases of flowers might fall on one's head: though as color they added to the richness and state of the *ensemble*. But the pale arras were exquisite, and some of great value. Whatever glittered there was gold. The stately gilt chairs and

rococo tables were gilded carved wood, not stucco; the flowered red satin was silk all through, the marbles were from Nature's workshop. The pictures on the walls were valueless and old-fashioned, but the frames of some were of beautiful carved wood.

The whole stretched in a dim, richly colored vista, room after room, where the doors answered each other, till the last was lost in obscurity. There were eleven reception rooms in a line at the front of the palace, the chapel running back at one end. Back of these were four large ante-rooms connected by corridors; and the curious mind puzzled itself in imagining what might occupy the unaccounted-for spaces behind those corridor walls.

This suite occupied all the front of the *piano nobile*, here the second floor. Giovanni and his wife occupied an apartment on the third floor.

Little by little, Beatrice's anguish soothed itself as she wandered about, examining everything, and hope came back. She imagined herself mistress there, and receiving visitors. Seated in a high-backed arm-chair, she bowed slightly to the Signora Alinori, without rising to receive her; then smiled and offered her hand to Signor Francesco, who followed. She rose and kissed the Signora Mattei, and gave a cool and supercilious smile to Aldegonda. A servant entered to say that the Contessa Maria humbly begged to be admitted; and she replied: "I do not know any Contessa Maria. Send her away!"

She gave orders that a purse of gold should be sent to the Franciscan monks to say masses for Count Paulo and Countess Beatrice Giorgini, her parents, and for her grandmother, the Signora Teresa Lanciani. She pronounced these names with emphasis, defying contradiction with look and tone. There was a

moment of hesitation; then she ordered masses also for "Grandmamma Tessa." She would not have the capuchins, because they were friends of the Signora Maria. Besides, it was at a convent of the capuchins that her mother had been married, and from which the record and the officiating priest had disappeared.

Then she imagined herself dressed for society, with train and coronet, which reminded her of the wreath of laurel leaves pinned to her petticoat. She unpinned it, threw off her veil, and substituted the wreath, enchanted with the effect. Already she looked taller and nobler in the dim long mirror. But a train was necessary. She ran to the chapel, caught a red and gold cope from the vestment bureau, and ran back to the mirror again, holding it to her waist and dragging it behind her. "Oh! how splendid!"

It was a grotesque figure; but, with the help of imagination, gave an idea of a splendidly dressed lady. The faint light through closed blinds brought out rosy folds on the heavy satin; and some tiny spots of light, too small for visible radiance in themselves, showed like spots of fire on the gold galloon that bordered the cope.

"How splendid!" murmured the girl again, gazing at her reflection in the mirror.

A step was heard on the stair. Beatrice flew to close herself in the chapel. "I will come in a minute," she replied to Betta's summons. "Wait!"

She folded the cope away and hid her laurel wreath behind the altar, then opened the door.

"Why! Signorina Bice, you have been before the Blessed Sacrament without anything on your head!" the woman exclaimed, much scandalized.

Beatrice threw both arms up over her head, the loose pink sleeves veiling her completely; and so

covered, she bent her knee before the altar and went out. "I have been searching," she said then, dropping her arms. "There is nothing!"

"Sh-h-h!" whispered Betta. "But, of course, there is nothing now, if ever there was. I told you so. What could you expect to find after eleven years? Now, let me fasten on your veil. We must go!"

Go! oh, better never to have come than come to go again! The rough villa, the cotton frock, the high-pitched voice of the Signora Alinori, the little respect shown to herself — all made her shrink from going back. "I cannot! I cannot!" she cried. "Oh, Betta, I wish that I could stay with you and the Signora Mattei!"

"Bice, dear, if we do not make haste some one may come," the woman urged. "Have patience; and when Checco marries, perhaps he will take you to Rome to live with him and his wife. You like Checco, don't you?"

The name quieted her at once. After all, she did not wish to leave the house where she could see him. He would come soon, and stay at least a month. She cast one more glance around, sighed and went out.

"Well, contessa, how do you like your palace?" asked the Signora Mattei jestingly, when they were in their carriage again.

Beatrice looked at her sternly. "You think it something to laugh at!" she said.

"No," said the lady, disconcerted, "I did not mean to laugh. But did you like it?"

"Yes!" she answered briefly. And in a moment added: "I thank you for having helped me to go there; but I cannot talk about it."

"Nobody understands!" she thought with an aching heart. "Nobody understands!"

Their drive home was almost in silence; and fat Giuseppe was waiting at Palazzo Mattei to take Beatrice out to the villa, with certain purchases that had been made in Sanzio for the Signora Alinori. His carriage was a wooden bench on a platform of boards over two wheels. "They think it is good enough for me, but they would not drive in it themselves!" thought Beatrice, as she mounted the unsteady vehicle.

It was already evening. Ave Maria had sounded from all the churches, and heavy clouds had overspread the sky, making the air still more obscure. When they drove out the city gate it was quite dark, a soft summer darkness, stirred from time to time by far-away soundless lightnings.

"I wish it were not so dark," said Beatrice, clinging to Giuseppe's arm. "I am afraid."

"Oh! the dark does not bite," he replied good-naturedly. "We shall be at home in five minutes. The horse knows the way. There is nothing to be afraid of."

As he spoke, a soft, sudden illumination from an unseen flash of lightning lifted for a moment all the thick clinging shadows, and disclosed the long white road stretching off before them.

"There is something in the road!" cried Beatrice. "It is like a log, or a man lying down. Oh, stop!"

"Seems to me I saw something," Giuseppe muttered, drawing in his horse.

They waited breathlessly and with straining eyes for another flash: and when it came, there was, indeed, visible at a short distance a dark object lying half across the road.

Not a word was uttered by either. Giuseppe laid the reins in Beatrice's hands, and, descending, led the

horse slowly forward, and waited again for a flash. It came, and revealed the figure of a man lying face down, his arms outstretched.

In the darkness that followed, there was no sound but the careful hoof-beats of the horse, and the rattle of a wheel against a stone as the wagon was led out past that object of terror. Then Giuseppe mounted to his place again, and, plying the lash, fled as for his life. They were not far from the road that turned off to the villa. Still whipping the horse, they rushed up the incline and reached the house.

The Signor Alinori stood smoking under the grape-trellis, the Signora was visible through an open window of the dining-room, preparing a salad for supper; and through the door beyond blazed a great, open kitchen fire, with half a kid turning on a spit before it.

Beatrice sprang out of the vehicle as soon as it stopped, and rushed into the house to tell her story.

"What is the matter with the girl?" asked the Signor Francesco, taking his pipe from his mouth and turning to look after her.

"You'd better come in!" said Giuseppe.

The gentleman entered quickly, without a word, and bolted the oaken door behind him. His wife had already closed the windows and the shutters. The whole house was hastily locked up for the night.

There was a man lying dead down in the dark road, and his murderer might still be lingering about. There was no question of going to see who he was, or if any breath of life yet lingered in him. The day laborers on the place had all gone home, and there were no men about save the master and Giuseppe. No one dreamed of their going down through the woods at that hour of night.

The family shut themselves in, conversed in whispers and started at every sound. When their belated supper was served, they lingered over it till almost midnight; and going to bed, left all their chamber doors open. But with the earliest dawn, the masters and workmen of the two villas all went down the winding path, the Signor Francesco and the advocate Randini carrying their rifles, the others with the inseparable knife in their belts. They looked warily to right and left as they went, and peered into every dark nook under the trees before passing it, till they came to the open road; and there, just as it had lain the night before, was the prone figure with its arms outstretched. The heavy dew of June had fallen on the coarse, patched clothing, gray hair and battered hat, and the birds were flying, curiously peering, around it.

"Lo Zoppo!" exclaimed Giuseppe.

It was Lo Zoppo, lying on his face, with an upward knife wound under his ribs.

Beatrice, after lying awake nearly all night, was sleeping heavily in the morning, when the noise of excited voices awakened her. She peeped out through her *persiane*, and heard the story told.

Lo Zoppo! He had talked with her only the morning before, and told her not to come to the laurel grove. And he was dead! How strangely he had acted, as if he wanted to see her, yet shrunk from her! Betta had said that she believed Lo Zoppo could tell something of Paulo Giorgini's disappearance if he would, but had forbidden her asking him.

"How I wish I had asked him yesterday!" she thought. "There is a chance gone forever!"

She sat down on the edge of her bed, and thought: Who had killed this poor man, who certainly was not

killed for his money, and scarcely for revenge? He was a cautious soul, and somewhat over-humble at times. Perhaps he had been killed lest he should tell her what he knew of her father. Perhaps he had been seen talking to her that morning.

She rose, glanced suspiciously about her, and began to dress herself. "I must not say that he spoke to me yesterday," she thought. Then, after a moment's study: "Yes, I must tell it at once. If they know, they will wonder that I do not tell. I must not seem to conceal anything, Betta says. She says, 'If you have secrets to conceal, pretend to be as open as the day, and to tell all that comes into your mind.' And she says: 'If you suspect the people around you, and want to watch them, pretend that you believe them innocent and good, and watch them with the back of your head.'"

She hurried down to hear the news repeated. The police had come out from Ombra, and taken the body away. Lo Zoppo's son, Alfonso, was frantic, and vowed revenge. He declared that Sopraciglia had been dogging his father about for weeks, and had been at villa Randini the day before.

"Why! Lo Zoppo spoke to me yesterday morning," Beatrice struck in with childish eagerness. "He asked me what made me get up so early, and I told him that I was going to Sanzio!"

Her communication excited but the momentary interest that was natural, and her ready lie saved her from being questioned.

"Don't say you saw and talked with him," the Signor Francesco said to her later. "You don't want to be called into court. When a crime is committed, always pretend that you know nothing about it."

She looked at him wistfully. He was kind to her,

and he had Checco's eyes and mouth. But she wondered if he knew or guessed at her father's fate, and was pretending not to know.

"The girl is growing pretty," he thought, and pinched her ear playfully.

"Beatrice, where are you?" called out the sharp voice of the Signora Alinori.

The gentleman turned impatiently away as his wife approached, and Beatrice went to meet her. "How I hate her!" she thought; and for the first time dared to look her steadily in the face when she was angry.

That look decided her fate.

"She shall go to the Signora Anna before the week is over," thought the jealous wife. "She'll not have much chance there to play the coquette!"

"I wonder," thought Beatrice, as she walked away through a *vigna*, "I wonder why Lo Zoppo told me not to go to the laurels!"

CHAPTER XI.

SABBATH MORNING.

The last object on which the eyes of Doctor James Martin rested before he dropped asleep that first night at "Perry's" was the rose-bush outside the window, with a single full-blown white rose shining in the light of the declining moon.

Perhaps that was the reason why, in some soft twilight of consciousness, either sinking into or rising from deep slumber, he had dreamed of white roses, and the sweet breath of their cool petals. A long wreath of white roses seemed to be still twined around him when the first birds waked him with their singing.

There were two in a nest near by, conversing with little silvery interrogatory phrases and dulcet replies. And this is what they seemed to say: —

"Sweet?"

"Yes, sweet!"

"Does the dawn peep?"

"Silvery out of the east."

"How did you sleep?"

"So sweet!"

"Three great drops of dew, see!"

"On you, too!"

"Here's a drop on a leaf: drink!"

"Slip it over the barbed edge into my beak. Live, sweet! Health, sweet!"

"Now for a stretch of the wings, headlong into the

blue. Make for that tremulous star! What is a star but dew!"

"Dew, sweet! For you, sweet!"

"Dew on the down of an azure bird that hovers and hides the sun, with its wide plumes every one spread, and touching the hills!"

"That you may sleep, sweet!"

The family rose quietly, an hour later than usual on Sunday morning. Mr. Perry and his children were going down to Four Corners to meeting; and there was a subdued excitement of dressing through the house, with sudden tip-toe skurryings out of sight of half-dressed youngsters, and low-voiced anxious calls to "marm."

"Where's my pantalettes, marm?"

"Marm, won't you come and hook my gown?"

"Marm, gimme my white stockin's."

All these requests being perfectly audible to the visitor, he concluded to get up and assist at the scene, being quite as curious to behold a rustic interior in his own country as he had been to see one abroad.

He went out therefore into the clean white kitchen, and seated himself by one of the windows. Mr. Perry, in immaculate shirt-sleeves, had just finished shaving himself at a little glass set up in the opposite window, and Mrs. Perry was drawing a pot of baked beans out of the brick oven on a long-handled shovel. Both answered his good-morning, the woman with a smile, the man with a Lord's-Day solemnity.

"Make haste, all of you!" Mrs. Perry cried, running toward the pantry with her long, laden shovel. "Breakfast's all ready."

"Wife, fasten my dickey," the husband said, and went to the pantry door with his chin in his shirt-

bosom, and his arms up over his shoulders holding the ends of his "dickey" together.

Mrs. Perry fastened her husband's collar at the back.

"And I've lost a button off my gallusses," he announced, tipping his head far back to button the dickey down in front.

Mrs. Perry was now drawing a loaf of brown bread from the oven. "Amanda will have to sew the button on for you," she said; "Amanda!" raising her voice, "come and sew a button on your father's gallusses. You ought not to leave yer buttons to be sewed on Sabbath day," she added severely.

The freckled Amanda, in a yellow cambric dress, came out of the girls' bedroom, smiled bashfully in passing the doctor, and went to her father's aid.

The button sewed on, Mr. Perry returned to his looking-glass, put on a high black satin stock, which kept his chin well up, and then stood looking at himself, and assuming expressions of different degrees of solemnity and severity, much to the doctor's amusement.

Breakfast was on the table, and they took their places, Mr. Perry and his sons in their shirt-sleeves. They seemed to look upon a coat as an out-door garment. A blessing was asked, and the first course of a terrible breakfast was served and eaten in silence. Mrs. Perry abused her food in a hushed voice, and pressed the multiplied dishes on her guest in pantomime. The solemnity of the Sabbath was upon them all.

"Such good religious people!" their visitor thought. But he also thought with regret of quiet far-away breakfasts, where the snowy-napkined tray had held only a cup of coffee, a roll, a tiny print of unsalted

butter, and the morning paper, and where he had eaten and read in blissful silence, without the misery of being obliged to talk early in the morning.

When breakfast was over, the stage-wagon was driven to the door, and they all piled into it. Amanda, with white pantalettes on her long legs, black lace mitts on her long arms, and an open-worked straw bonnet tied on with a blue ribbon, sat beside Isaac on the back seat, a small girl between them. A large girl and two boys occupied the front seat with their father. On Sunday the elder Mr. Perry drove.

This was their day of glory. Only to go to meeting was a pleasure and an excitement, but to go in the stage imparted something official and exceptional to their position. Old Mr. Perry never assumed any airs on such occasions, and Isaac treated their state with the nonchalance of one to the manner born, though secretly a little mortified at having the reins taken from him on these public occasions, and at his father's jog-trot mode of driving. But Amanda's satisfaction was profound and absorbing. A Faubourg St. Germain mademoiselle in the burr, she sat aloft in her buff dress and blue ribbons, and contemplated her own importance with a serene ecstasy.

The wagon with its load out of sight, and Mrs. Perry employed in giving a later breakfast to "Granmarm" Perry, who never came to the table with the family, the doctor set off at last to visit his own domain. He had wished to make this visit quite alone.

His land began at ten minutes' walk from Perry's, and a little red schoolhouse marked the dividing-line. Here the forest had never been cut. The trees fell with old age where they grew, and decayed where they fell. The pleasant road lost itself in slight

returning curves, and had lines of grass and clover and buttercups between the wheel tracks, and a lace-work of sunshine and shadow over it. The air was still fresh, and the trees at either hand sparkled and splashed with dew.

Dr. Martin looked about him with serious delight. Noble, but vague, ambitions had long been stirring in his heart. It did not seem enough to him to live an honored life, and die a peaceful death. Dearer and higher far than any capricious homage given by man, sweeter and holier by far than the sinking away into his last sleep surrounded by loved ones, was the cherished hope that he might leave the spot of earth he should inhabit better than he found it, that he might bring light into some dark place, and purity where there had been uncleanness. If, then, he should leave children who would continue his work, he would have founded a dynasty more glorious than the Cæsars.

Visions such as these had floated on the current of his blood from childhood, but without ever having taken shape in his brain. He saw no other way before him than to be a doctor, and take his father's place. It was a noble profession, and his father had been a good man. Yet, with all his filial reverence and affection, the thought of living such a life as his father had lived filled him with terror.

Visions had risen before him like bubbles, and like bubbles they had burst. But as his disgust grew greater with the life of Southport, he felt a constantly increasing stir beneath the surface of his mind, where the instinctive forces of his nature wrought at the foundations of an edifice not yet at level of his consciousness. Now and then an outline of some superstructure would rise suddenly, like a fountain-jet, and

sink again, but often leave its ghost upon the air, a thing to smile at sadly as it wavered there among common-sense realities, refusing to be exorcised; so fair, and so impossible!

As he walked slowly along the road this sunny morning, with rustling walls of dewy green between him and the spoiled old world, these ghostly lines took life again, and joined themselves into an almost definite shape, beautiful, but desolate. It oppressed him. "It is impossible!" he said, and shook his fancies off, and looked about him.

In his loitering walk, broken by many pauses, he had reached the red schoolhouse. He turned aside, and tried the door. It was locked. He looked in at a window and saw two double rows of seats separated by aisles, one at either side of a wide space. In the centre of this space was an iron stove, with flowers and evergreens almost covering it. At one end of the space the door entered a small vestibule, and at the other end, raised on a platform, was the teacher's desk. In the sunshine of the window a little cloud of flies sailed about in a slow minuet. At intervals two of them would suddenly dash around each other, as if they tied a knot, then drop again into their slow swimming motion. A few large flies, too heavy to sustain this lightly floating measure, buzzed and bumped their heads against the window-panes.

The doctor smiled, recollecting the Italian association of a *moscone* with a coming lover, or, at least, a visitor. "I must visit the school to-morrow," he thought as he pursued his way.

A beautiful ledge, tufted with moss and overgrown with cedar trees, pushed itself out at his right. It had been his favorite haunt during that far-away summer spent with aunt Betsey in the woods. He

had dreamed away many an hour there, wandering from chamber to chamber where the cedars ranged themselves in lines to make the walls, and stood apart for doors.

Everywhere at the right the land rose from the road; but at the left it ran moist and level for half a mile till it reached a low, heavily wooded mountain. Here grew the wide-armed oaks and beeches, and elms sprang into the air and broke into a spray of twigs and verdure, and poplars trembled at themselves, and spruce-trees lifted their dark spires above the brighter foliage. And here were wolves and bears, and clouds of gray deer.

Next the ledge at the right was a hollow full of beech-trees, and over the round, full tops of these a thin column of smoke rose straight into the air. The doctor stopped to look at it, his heart beating quickly; for it rose from his own hearth.

A few steps farther, and the brown log-house came into sight. It stood back from the road on a smooth rise, with grass and clover waving about, a flower-garden at the southern door at which he looked, and snow-white curtains showing through the small open windows. Behind the house, under a slanting roof, was a line of bee-hives, and a rod of dark pathway leading to a boiling-spring that was overhung by a beautiful silver birch-tree; and there was a long barn, and a corn-field. Framing all stood the primeval forest.

How well he remembered it! It needed only that a slender, light-footed woman should appear at that southern door, with a white apron over her dark cotton dress, and a white lace kerchief laid smoothly ever her gray hair. For one whirling moment the twenty years were a dream, and he was a boy again. Then, with a sigh, he pursued his way.

The land was all surrounded by a fence of cedar poles; and, as at the other farms, the entrance was barred by the same poles. From these bars a path led up to a rough porch over the northern door.

There was no one in sight as the doctor entered, and the silence was so profound that he heard the buzz of a wasp in a pumpkin-blossom beside the path. The door of the porch and the inner door were open, and he tapped lightly with his cane.

There was no reply.

He stepped through the porch into the large kitchen. A log was smouldering in the cavernous fire-place built of stones, a kettle simmered on the crane, a cat lay sleeping on the hearth. One of the walls was bright with tin; and the sun shone in through an eastern and a southern window, both veiled with pink and purple morning-glories.

The owner of this castle of silence tapped on the floor with his cane, and again without receiving an answer; but a faint murmur, like a human voice, came to him from the parlor, and he went forward.

The parlor was one of four rooms into which the house was divided, and was separated by a little entry from the kitchen. From this entry the south door opened on to the flower garden. The door stood open, wreathed around by a dewy hop-vine. Bees were buzzing about; there was a morning-cloud of pinks outside, and bushes full of opening roses, and a strip of tall waving grass beyond. On to one of these grass blades sank a bobolink, and began to sing. The doctor stopped and listened with a smile to the whole *aria*. "Talk of nightingales!" he said, and then turned toward the parlor.

It was a pleasant corner room, the logs that formed the walls showing in ribs through the pictures pasted

over them. For, from having been covered at first with newspapers, the walls had gradually been pasted over with wood and steel engravings, taken from papers and periodicals, every size and variety of picture entering. The fire-place of stones was filled with cedar boughs, the sofa and chairs were covered with gayly flowered copper-plate, and there were braided mats on the floor.

In a low rocking-chair by the leaf-embroidered sunshine of the southern window sat an old woman, reading in the Bible. Her white hair was partly covered by a white kerchief, and she wore a blue cotton apron, the creases of its careful folding still fresh. The face of this woman was strong-featured, wrinkled, and tanned by the weather. Her eyes were sunken, her chest flat, her shoulders broad and bent. Yet she was beautiful as she sat there; for while she read, her soul, dilated by faith, shone softly out, and filled with light the lacking curves of her poor wasted body. She read in a whisper, her left fore-finger following the text; and from time to time she adjusted her brass-mounted spectacles with the right hand.

"The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters."

A divine peacefulness filled the room.

Painted so on a large canvas, with a break in the ceiling to admit a beam of light and a bouquet of cherub faces, she would have made a good altar-piece.

There was a stag outside looking in at the window, his head with its antlers making a finely outlined shadow on the sunshine at the old woman's feet. He stood as motionless as a statue, his ear bent as he listened to the murmuring voice, scarce louder than the hum of insects round him. But at sound of a

man's step, he tossed his head back with a sniff, and was off.

The doctor watched him passing over the green, as noiselessly as the shadow of a cloud, then tapped on the floor with his cane till the old woman heard him.

"Pardon me for interrupting your reading!" he said.

Her finger still on the page, she turned her head with a quiet smile of welcome before seeing who spoke; and at sight of a stranger closed the Bible, leaving her hand inside, and waited a little with the slowness of age, still faintly smiling.

The doctor told her who he was. "Of course you are Mrs. Winter, the housekeeper," he said.

She rose at once, and looked at him with an earnest gaze. "Poor Miss Martin," she said. "She was always talking about ye. You're welcome, sir. Sit down. How you have grown since you were here!"

The doctor laughed. "Well, a man ought to grow between ten years old and thirty-one. It is twenty years since I was here. In that time your children have grown and gone away."

"Yes, they have all gone away," she echoed sadly. "I was in hopes that Nancy would stay with me. I thought she might get a husband here and carry on the place, just as I and her father did. But since Ann White went to the cotton factory, all the other girls are crazy to go. I couldn't keep her back. You see after a little while she will have two dollars a week; and, besides, she sees a good many people there; and she found it lonesome here. But, as I wrote to you, I can't leave her alone in such a place, and I must go too. She's got a little chamber where she and I can sleep together."

She sighed unconsciously, and looked out at the

broad green field and forest. She had taken off her spectacles, and her faded eyes, fixed far away on vacancy, had all that melancholy and resignation of old age, which sees nothing before it but death, yet faithfully performs every duty which remains to be done, the more faithfully that they are so few.

They talked of business then; and the doctor went out and walked about the place with his tenant. After a while, she went in to prepare a luncheon for him, and he wandered about alone.

What a paradise might be made of this place! He felt like a man who suddenly finds himself possessed of countless millions. It was only now that he realized the fact of possession. That long corn-field running off to a point that cleft the eastern woods, a field they fitly called the "wedge," was his own. He could wall it in, or let it lie with only a stump fence, as now; plant it, or let it run to weeds, as he might choose. That solemn pine-tree that was tall when he was an infant, he could make a bonfire of it, if the fancy took him; and at his word the slender beauty of those silver birches would fall to the ground. The grand old woods reared themselves high and darkling on all sides, seeming to prop the horizon; yet he had the power to wrap them in a wild conflagration, and reduce them to ashes for miles around, sending bears, and wolves, and foxes, and deer, and serpents, flying out into the settlements, and showers of sparks to threaten the houses far and near.

Fancy threw her lasso out with a savage strength, and laughed, and let it slip. His will was not to do evil, but good.

He began to lay plans; or, rather, plans began to suggest themselves.

"When you have children, they can come here in

the summer, as you did," said a small voice in the midst of his vision of stone-wall building and swamp-draining.

"Children should be born in the country."

"Children should spend their first years in the country."

"The luxuries of the country are more exquisite than those of the town. The only necessity it is likely to lack, and which the town is almost sure to furnish, is sympathetic companionship. There is no companionship here for an educated man. But if" —

"Impossible!" the doctor exclaimed aloud. "Who would" —

There was a momentary break in the colloquy between his outer and inner consciousness. Then the two began together. "Perhaps one of the most serious needs of a family in a country place is to have a doctor in cases of emergency. But if the man were himself a doctor" —

"I will plant clover in that hollow!" exclaimed the doctor almost fiercely.

"Then the railroad. — It isn't as though the place would be always remote."

The railroad sounded like something practical. John Martin had assured his brother that it was almost certain a railroad would be made in that part of the State within a few years, and that it would pass near his land, if not through it. That meant riches, and a town within reach.

"I can make a lot of cider," the doctor said, looking about. "Fortunately, apples grow well here. As our people go abroad, and foreigners come here, we shall gradually give up our abominable tea and coffee as sole beverages at table. Perhaps I could start a little

vigna on some sunny spot. It wouldn't take many grapes to make a hogshead of *mezzo vino*. I would fight rum with that and cider. The man who tries to fight rum and gin with cold water and tea is an imbecile."

He went in to his luncheon, which was adorned with the inevitable coffee-pot; and while he ate he went on thinking: "One might have a good dairy here. Why shouldn't we make as good cheeses as other people?" He knew just how they make their cheeses in England, Switzerland, and Italy. Was it not all written down in his crisp, neat hand in one of the library of small note-books at home? And had he not brought home packages of those fragrant herbs with which some people flavor their curds?

"Marry come up, but I have!" he said to himself, and gave a little nod which was not quite sideways, but might be called cornerwise, a movement intended to convey an impression of superior acuteness.

The doctor was getting what his aunt Betsey would have described as "very high in his mind." His broad shoulders itched to take on the weight of this new world, Atlas-wise, and bear it aloft.

As he went away that afternoon, Mrs. Winter gave him a handful of delicately colored fringed pinks, tied with sweet grass around the stems. They made him think of a fair, sweet woman whom he had not yet seen, but should see some day. The petals were the color of a soft blush. "God bless you, dear, whoever you are!" he said fervently; and, kissing the modest flowers, his imagination touched the cheek of his future bride.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DEACON.

In the afternoon, Dr. Martin went up to visit the Heath family, whose farm lay a mile beyond his own. He had been there more than once on that wondrous tenth summer of his; but the only clear recollection he had retained was of a laughing young woman searching for four-leaved clover in the field, her mop of loose yellow hair just visible over the grass, like some great flower shining in the sun. Her name was Myra Heath; and he knew from Mrs. Winter that she had inherited the place, and had married her cousin, without changing her name.

He walked along the forest-shaded road, shaking his cane at the deer which peeped out at him and skipped away at his approach. He asked himself what sort of civilization would follow this superb wildness.

"Nations begin well enough. They rise, bloom, and sometimes give us one crop of fair fruit. Then they rot, leaving, perhaps, here and there some sample of perfect civilization. But this sample, instead of being adopted as a model, is ever doomed to destruction by the corrupted majority. Later generations may point backward to it, and praise, even deify it. But do they profit by it? No. The same story of decadence is repeated with the monotony of slow, eternal revolution. Christ must have meant this when he said: 'Many are called, but few are chosen.'"

He studied over the problem as he walked slowly on.

"The statue of Janus is the statue of wisdom," he thought. "The double-faced mind which, while looking forward and preparing for the future, never loses sight of the lessons of the past, — that is the true governing mind. Is it not?" he asked, addressing a tall stag which faced him from between two birch-trees, like a king between two flag-staffs.

The creature tossed his head disdainfully, and skipped away.

The doctor looked smilingly after him, then resumed his walk.

"I would like," he said, descending to personalities, "that my children should be bright, strong, sincere, and courteous, with a firm hand for a friend and a hard fist for a foe. I do not hope for saints or geniuses, but for a little tribe which shall be lovable of God and man, trustworthy, courageous, and hopeful, and, if not always justifiable, at least never without excuse. They should make their children better than themselves; and those again" —

He ceased speaking, and before his eyes there seemed to flow a widening stream that grew far off into an ocean wherein his thought was drowned.

"*Abraham et semini ejus in sæculum*," he said, laughing.

And then he became aware that he stood before a "pair of bars," and that a barefooted urchin perched there was looking at him with a stolid stare. The boy was about ten years of age, and of a pale flax-color. His figure stood out clearly on a background of dark buildings and green fields.

The doctor asked his name.

"Samuel." The boy opened his mouth far enough to emit this name in a quiet, colorless tone; then shut it again, and continued to stare.

"Samuel what?" asked the doctor.

"Heath."

"Your father's name is Heath?"

A nod answered this rather superfluous question.

"I've come to see him," the doctor said, advancing a step.

"Ain't ter home."

"Where is he?"

"Gone to meetin'."

"When will he be back?"

"Dunno."

The calm stare had never relented.

"Look here, boy!" said the doctor, losing patience. "You just get down off that bar and open for me. I'm coming in."

With a somewhat provoking deliberation the boy descended and let the bars down.

By this time two or three children came out of the house and stood on the door-step, staring; and, as their visitor entered the enclosure, violently hissed at by a flock of geese, a woman appeared behind the children, hastily smoothing back her somewhat disordered hair. It was the yellow hair he remembered shining over the clover-tops.

She waited for him to come within speaking distance, then gave him a smiling welcome, pushing behind her the pretty brood of sunburnt children. She was a magnificent woman, large and beautifully shaped, with dimples in her small brown hands, a dimple in her cheek, and a heap of hair, not golden, but tawny. Her eyes, too, were a pale, yellowish hazel, only speckled with blue, and were full of a soft, laughing brightness.

The door opened directly into the kitchen, which was the only reception-room of the house.

Having introduced himself, and received a second welcome full of enthusiasm, Doctor Martin began to make acquaintance with the six children, and ended by taking the youngest, Sylvanus, on his knee. This was a beautiful boy of three or four years, all his mother, excepting a pair of pathetic brown eyes.

While they talked, Samuel peeped in at the door several times, and withdrew his head suddenly on being observed; and presently a loud hissing, scarcely of geese, was heard from without.

A short silence followed, then another peep and dodge, and again the fierce hissing.

"Samuel!" cried his mother with a weak assumption of authority.

"What'm?" said Samuel promptly, putting his head in at the door.

"B'have yourself!" commanded Mrs. Heath, and went on with her conversation.

There was a moment of quiet; then a vociferous cackling of hens was heard. Silence again, Samuel's head, a dodge, and renewed cackling.

"Samuel!" cried Mrs. Heath as before.

"What'm?"

"B'have yourself."

After a short interval the same scene was repeated, with the substitution of a malignant caterwauling.

The silence which followed was of such long duration that the doctor concluded that young Mr. Heath must be at the end of his repertory. Then a man's heavy step was heard.

Mrs. Heath smilingly interrupted herself to say: "There's the deacon, now."

Her visitor had already learned that Mr. Heath occupied this dignified position in the church at Four Corners.

A voice was heard outside, solemn and stern, from brazen lungs. "Samuel!" and a mild, prompt "Whassir?" in response.

"Go in, and take your Bible!" said the voice.

Samuel came in instantly, his head meekly in advance of his body, took a small New Testament from a shelf, opened it in the middle, upside-down, seated himself bolt-upright on the edge of a chair, and stared idiotically at the blank space between the two pages.

After a moment Deacon Heath entered. He was a stern-faced, powerfully built man, with stiff, dark hair slightly frizzled. He wore a black dress suit, a cylinder hat, and very creaking boots. One perceived that his clothes had been carefully preserved from a remote time. He stared at sight of a visitor, and saluted him somewhat coldly.

The doctor had an illumination. It occurred to him that Sunday visits might be considered impious in that region, especially when made on a deacon. He made haste to explain. His time, he said, was limited; and he had a great deal to do. As the deacon knew, he must find a tenant for his farm, and he wished for advice and information from his nearest neighbors. Mrs. Winter had done very well about the hay, and grain-cutting; but for all that was to follow in autumn harvesting, and for the house itself, he had yet to provide.

At this the deacon unbent, and professed himself willing to give any advice and assistance in his power, if the doctor would wait till he had changed his clothes. That hat and swallow-tailed coat were evidently held to be a strictly official costume.

"So now you may go to mamma, Silvio," the doctor said, putting the child down from his knee. "You are a good boy."

"Yes," said Mrs. Heath, holding out her arms. "My baby is always good Sundays." She cast a significant, reproachful glance at Samuel, who continued to stare at the blank space in his Testament. "I don't have to tell Sylvanus" — with emphasis — "more than once to behave himself;" still with a sidelong look of weak severity.

Samuel thrust his head still farther forward, and his fixed stare became a glare.

One of his sisters, looking at him, began to giggle.

"Emily Jane," said her mother sternly, "b'have yourself."

Emily Jane's face instantly became a study in consequence of its swift changes from painful solemnity to convulsive mirth. A glance at her brother brought her to a state of strangulation; a glance at her mother changed her features to an expression that was almost fierce in its effort to be serious. The doctor was glad that she did not look at him; for he felt disposed to laugh with her.

"Mudder," murmured the voice of Sylvanus at his mother's apron.

"What, dear?" asked Mrs. Heath, fondly soothing his fair curls.

"Isn't God 'most rested?" whispered the child.

"Why, Silvy?"

"'Cause I'se tired," he answered wearily.

"God rested all day, Sunday," said Mrs. Heath.

The boy sighed and said no more.

The deacon appeared shorn of his rays; and he and the doctor went out to talk business, and look at the farm. They walked about, then leaned on a pole fence enclosing the clover-field. This was a solid mass of trefoil, pink and white with blossoms, and buzzing with bees. The light wind that soothed the

grass into satin waves, tossed the clover in rich clustered masses.

Observing this man, the doctor was reminded of Cotton Mather and witch-burning, mediæval monks and heretic-burning. He was upright, but narrow; and in his stern fervor of bigoted belief and stubborn will was every possibility of implacable, sincere cruelty.

"I'm glad you can't hold the whip over my conscience!" thought the visitor as they were about to separate.

"I'm going down to visit the school to-morrow," the deacon said. "And I'll go over the place with you in the afternoon." Here he suddenly interrupted himself to exclaim, "Samuel!" stiffening as he spoke, and following his exclamation with a stern stare of at least two minutes' duration.

Samuel, who had come out with the other children, and was sneaking about his father and their visitor, immediately put his head forward, and went straight toward the house, noiseless on his bare feet. When he heard his father again occupied in conversation, he began to lift his feet ludicrously high, and set them down almost in the same spot from which he had lifted them. Emily Jane watched this performance, giggling convulsively, with her blue cotton tier held over her mouth. Near the door, Samuel turned his face to look back, his feet still going up and down, but making no progress; till, his father showing signs of turning in his direction, he disappeared in a twinkling.

CHAPTER XIII.

A WHITE ROSE.

Walking about his own place the next morning, the doctor, from a high point which commanded a view of "Perry's," saw a carriage drawn by a pair of horses dash up to their gate. A gentleman alighted, assisted a lady down, and remounted. There was the wave of a saluting hat, and the carriage dashed away again.

The school-mistress had returned from her visit to Four Corners.

The style of her return much surprised the looker-on from Beechlands. He had not expected to see such a turn-out there; and, moreover, the lightness with which the lady had descended was somewhat at variance with the idea he had formed of Miss Shepherd, the mistress of the red schoolhouse. "Dear old soul!" he had called her. "I must drop in and see her as I go down," he thought.

Some children were passing by his house. The tribe of Heath was on its way to school, with rifle and dinner-basket, all of them, from Adam, the second son, down to Sylvanus, the youngest. Sylvanus was almost into b—a, ba, and Adam was beginning algebra.

Toward noon the doctor started on his leisurely way to dinner. When he reached the schoolhouse, the door and windows were wide open, and there issued from them a buzzing louder than that of the *mosconi* of the day before. The loudness of this buzzing

seemed to strike some one besides himself; for, as he paused, a clear, sweet voice said commandingly: "Silence, children!"

It was more authoritative than Monsieur Gambetta's "*Un peu de silence, Messieurs!*" but not more effective with this assembly of small republicans.

The doctor smiled unconsciously, and waited to hear if the voice would speak again. It did not, and he went to the door and tapped with his cane.

The buzzing ceased instantly. Then the teacher's voice, somewhat subdued, was heard to say, "Thomas Heath, go to the door."

Thomas Heath appeared, and grinned recognition.

"Ask your teacher if she will allow me to visit her school," the doctor said, discreetly abstaining from seeing a group visible through the half-open door. The mistress sat with her back toward him, five little ones clustered about her knee, on which rested a brightly colored A B C book.

Full of excitement, Thomas went to announce their visitor. "Mistress, doctor wants ter c'min."

In a minute the mistress stood before him, blushing, but dignified. "Will you please to walk in, sir?" she said, in a ceremonious manner, holding the door.

He bowed and entered, unable for the moment to utter a word. This, then, was the good spinster who was to resemble Aunt Betsey.

He saw, instead, the stateliest and loveliest of girls, with a sprig of cedar in the splendid coils of her auburn hair, a pair of lustrous gray eyes, and a neck as white as swan's-down. She wore a simple, dark-colored gown and a white apron.

He felt sun-smitten.

The mistress escorted him to her chair of state behind the desk; and, when he had reached it, waved

her hand to the children, who had risen at his entrance, to seat themselves.

"I hope that I do not incommode you," he found voice to say.

"Not at all!" she replied, with a fleeting cordiality. Then, resuming her dignified manner, "I am afraid that you will not find my school very interesting."

"I was never more interested in my life!" the visitor declared; and begged her to go on just as though he were not there.

The school-mistress's blush, a soft, sensitive pink all over her face, had not yet faded away. She was, indeed, both embarrassed and frightened. Such a visitor was a formidable object to a young teacher who had no show classes; and, moreover, Adam Heath had announced to her that his father was coming.

The five little ones remained standing where they had been surprised, all staring at the visitor; but when their teacher, a little vexed that they had not melted away unperceived during the stir of his entrance, motioned them somewhat imperatively to their seats, they started so promptly that they ran against each other and upset the chair. One of them went down with a bump and a howl, whereupon a titter ran through the school.

The school-mistress hastened to pick up the unfortunate one, but the doctor was before her. He had recognized little Sylvanus Heath; and presently the child was seated on their visitor's knee, in the mistress's awful desk, with a ticking gold watch open in his hands to console him for a rising bump on his forehead.

Miss Shepherd looked at the child for a moment with a sweet smile as he sat there steadying his quiv-

ering lip; and that sweet glance swept the doctor an instant in withdrawing itself. It was his turn to blush now, and he did blush with pleasure at that sign of kind approval.

Then Minerva put on her helmet again.

"First class in arithmetic!" she called out in a voice that had something of a clarion ring through its softness.

"What a beautiful voice!" thought the visitor. "I like a woman's voice which can raise itself without cracking or squealing."

Ten boys and girls came out and seated themselves on the front benches. Among them were Adam Heath, his brother Samuel, and Amanda Perry. They carried books and slates, and all their faces, except Samuel's, showed the suppressed eagerness and elation of anticipated glory. He, as the star performer, assumed a careless, bored look, intended to convey the impression that mathematical triumphs were an old story to him.

Miss Shepherd read out ten problems bristling with difficulties. One full of labyrinthine windings was given to Samuel Heath to work out on the blackboard. But, just as pencils and chalk had begun their work, a second knock at the door, this time from ponderous knuckles, nipped their glories in the bud.

The mistress laid down her book with a trembling hand, and bade Amanda Perry go to the door.

She was frightened, indeed, this time! Deacon Heath was plainly visible, and he was her school-committee man, and had not yet given her a certificate for Beechlands. She had passed a good examination at Shepherdsville, and had come here, not only certified as to her acquirements, but recommended. A local examination was quite unnecessary, and a certifi-

cate might well be written without asking her a question; but would Deacon Heath understand that?

"He is capable of asking me questions which Solomon himself could not have answered," she thought.

The doctor offered his chair to the deacon, and seated himself on the bench beside Samuel Heath, declining the second chair the mistress offered him. Samuel instantly made a furtive pantomime of smoothing down an imaginary beard, continuing the movement quite to the floor. The doctor had, in fact, a habit of passing his hand down his long beard.

Grins and titterings, painfully disguised as coughs, greeted this exhibition.

"Of course, he won't think of questioning me before the children, and, above all, before a stranger!" the teacher thought, as she stood awaiting the deacon's orders; but her heart fluttered like a bird.

The deacon uttered a loud, preparatory sounding "Ahem!" that made her knees tremble.

"Would you like to see the writing-books?" she asked suddenly.

The writing-books might either divert the danger or bring it on, as the teacher herself set the copies; but they would give her a moment's time to get that fire out of her cheeks. Mary Shepherd was a white beauty, with cheeks like a pond-lily when nothing agitated her, and to feel herself blushing increased her blushes.

The deacon, after a moment's hesitation, consented, and looked through the pile of pink and blue covered books she took out of the desk and gave him, one by one. Doctor Martin, to relieve the oppressive silence, went and glanced them over also.

"They do very well," he said cheerfully, looking at the pretty, precise Italian writing of the copies.

The teacher gave him a nervous bow of acknowledg-

ment. He stood so near her that he smelt the fresh odor of the cedar-spray in her hair, and could examine the hair itself. The parting was

One moonbeam from the forehead to the crown,

and the rich, red-bronze mass was twisted up into a figure eight, with a wrought shell comb supporting the upper loop at the curve of her well-shaped head, making thus a narrow coronet as seen from the front. What a white neck she had! and what a pretty hand!

Deacon Heath made no reply to the doctor's remark, and had such an air of thinking that it was out of order, that the speaker felt as if he had talked aloud in church. The last book was laid aside, and there was another loud, harsh "Ahem!"

"O Lord!" thought Mary Shepherd; and she thought it so nearly aloud, that the sudden explosive breath reached a bearded cheek near by.

"Write your name, and the name of your town, county [taown, caounty, of course], and State," said the school-committee man to the teacher.

Dr. Martin started, and felt that he ought not to be there, yet saw no escape.

Mary wrote in the midst of an awful silence, her cheeks flaming, her hand unsteady.

"What is the legal interest on money in this State?" pursued the deacon.

She told him in a voice which betrayed the strain.

"How many counties are there in this State?" was the next question.

Her voice faltered in answering. Oh! suppose that he should ask her how many inhabitants there were in the different cities or States! She was sure that she could not tell. If he should put such a question,

she was afraid that she might laugh hysterically; for an Irishman's answer occurred most inopportunely to her mind: "Bedad, that dipinds on whedder Mrs. O'Flannigan has had a gyurrul or a b'y."

Oh! suppose that she *should* be unable to answer, and *should* laugh and then cry, and he should refuse her a certificate, and she should have to go back in disgrace to her family!

The deacon made a sudden launch into space, and wished to know the diameter of the sun, and the position of the "Great Dipper," and how far off the moon was, and what were her illustrious habits. Then, returning to his native planet as suddenly as he had left it, he interrogated the mistress sternly regarding greater and lesser circles, diameters, poles, and oceans. The agility of his mind contrasted favorably with the ponderosity of his manner.

The teacher answered all triumphantly.

The doctor sat both amused and embarrassed, his eyes fixed on the floor. He suspected the deacon of a wish to show him that all the erudition of the world is not confined to large cities, and that it is not necessary to travel to the antipodes in order to know the secrets of the starry heavens.

The children stared in breathless silence. To them this examination was as the battle of the gods to mortals. Behold the questioner questioned, and as frightened as any one of them with an unlearned lesson! There was, perhaps, some exultation in the thought. And yet they loved her; and had the hysterical scene which she had been imagining taken place, there would have been a unanimous sniffle of sympathy throughout the school-room.

"What is the largest city in the world?" asked the deacon, who seemed to read the questions from

his thumbs as they stood up side by side against the tightly closed fists on the desk before him.

It was coming! Of course populations would follow! Mrs. O'Flannigan's possible "b'y" began to dandle itself before her eyes again, and she breathed quickly. Oh! which was the greater? London or Pekin? She could not recollect.

In that awful pause Mary Shepherd glanced at the doctor. He was looking at her, and, his hand shielding his mouth at one side, he silently pronounced a name.

Blushing, she repeated it. She would have repeated it if he had said Four Corners.

"Spell phthisic," said the school-committee man monotonously, looking at his thumbs.

Mary spelt the ridiculous word with a radiant smile. Good-by, populations! And yet there were certain words which she never could be quite sure of rightly spelling.

But the deacon gave her no further spelling trial. He probably thought that a person who can spell phthisic can spell anything.

"How wide is the Amazon River at its mouth?" he asked; and a downward movement of the thumbs seemed to indicate that this was the final question.

The teacher's heart and her ideas expanded at the sign. "Three hundred and sixty miles!" she answered with recovered stateliness.

The first class in geography began to giggle. Was not that very question in the lesson of the day?

Deacon Heath looked at the teacher with doubt and surprise in his face. "I thought that it was only one hundred and fifty miles wide," he said.

"Oh!" the doctor put in eagerly, "you are both right. Some friends of mine have just returned from

the Amazon. At a certain point the mouth is only one hundred and fifty miles wide, but just outside of that it is three hundred and sixty."

The mistress gave one brief glance at his laughing eyes, and averted her own. He, having thus rescued her, turned a fierce look upon the first class in geography, which shrank abashed, not only at the stranger's bold and threatening eyes, but before the fact that they were in the presence of two persons who knew something that had not been revealed to the geography nor to the school-committee.

The deacon, slightly disconcerted, asked no more questions, but set himself laboriously to write a certificate that Miss Mary Shepherd was qualified to teach the district (he called it deestric) school in the town of Beechlands. Having presented this paper to the teacher, he rose to go, the children all rising with him. He had meant to make an address; but the slight mortification he suffered changed his mind. It would not do to risk his supremacy a second time.

"Be you going to stay here a few days longer?" he asked, in taking leave of the dcctor, who had offered his hand.

Always impressionable, and at that moment absorbed in listening to a soft sigh of relief breathed out in his hearing, the doctor replied, "I be!" then fell to coughing.

Miss Shepherd became radiant as soon as the deacon was fairly outside the door. Her trial safely over, for the first time the stranger within her gates saw her as she was. She was modest, self-possessed, full of a soft energy, white, sound, and soulful. Withal, a young woman not given to foolish laughter, but capable of assuming a very imposing dignity.

The doctor went out, and found the deacon waiting

for him. "I suppose it's nigh on to twelve o'clock," he remarked, putting a thumb and forefinger into his empty watch-pocket.

"It is a quarter past twelve," the doctor said.

"Sho!" said the deacon; and went reluctantly away, promising to go over the doctor's farm with him that afternoon.

"I'll marry that girl, if I have to carry her off by force!" the doctor said to himself excitedly, as he walked up and down, waiting for the teacher to come out.

The boys came out, shouting as soon as their feet were on the turf, and the girls came more soberly after, with their dinner-baskets or pails. They scattered about to eat their dinners. Some climbed a great mossy bowlder as high as the schoolhouse. Others seated themselves on a low rock overhung by a witch-hazel tree; and others, on a bank dotted with tiny yellow violets by the thread of a brook at the road-side. Three little barefooted ones, with their toes turned in, sat on the doorstep, and ate doughnuts and cheese.

The mistress came out, tying on a white muslin sun-bonnet. She had been thinking of her visitor, how bright, strong, and helpful he was. She liked doctors. How they all loved their dear old doctor in Shepherdsville! How often he had soothed their fears, and changed their anguish to joy! How many a time they had run, terrified, to call him, day or night, especially for mother, and hung trembling on his looks and words when he came! How their sick ones turned to look at the door by which he was to enter!

They liked him better than they liked the minister, with whom they did not feel at ease. He used to

ask them if they loved God; and they did not know whether they loved Him or not, and had to maintain an awkward silence, or say "I dunno!" in an imbecile way. Jack Shepherd always used to run his tongue out at this question, not from disrespect, but from sheer inability to use that organ in any other way.

Miss Mary Shepherd was now twenty years of age, and a very intelligent young woman; but she still shrank a little from the minister, lest he should ask her if she loved God; and though the grammar of her answer would have been more correct, the spirit would still have been the childish, "I dunno!"

"Yes; I like doctors best," she whispered, and went out to the one who awaited her.

"Oh! you dear girl!" he thought as she came toward him with a calm and unaffected modesty.

They walked down the road side by side.

"It was stupid of Deacon Heath to question you before the children," the doctor said at once. "You must excuse my remaining. I was taken by surprise."

"I was so afraid of making a mistake!" the teacher said. "I hardly knew what I was saying. In another minute I should have cried."

"How could you feel like crying," exclaimed the doctor, "when you saw before you that jolly Amazon River with its mouth stretched from ear to ear? I have heard of laughing brooks; but, by Jove! the smile of that river was Olympian!"

Oh, the sweet laugh! How it made the birds turn their heads to see what new songster was at hand! "Of course, I knew better!" she said, her head drooping till only the tip of her pretty nose was visible beyond her sun-bonnet.

"Oh, well!" the doctor said, consolingly, "it's all over now; and I'm sure you are glad that it is."

"I be!" retorted the school-mistress slyly; and the sun-bonnet turned just far enough to show her whole profile for an instant, with a flash of gold from the hair, and a soft beam from the clear gray eye.

CHAPTER XIV.

A FLOWER-DE-LUCE.

Doctor Martin walked on clouds. He had to hold himself by the wrists, as it were, not to say more than he ought, or do something extravagant. Oh! the fresh, sweet air! the wild, grand woods! and, oh! the woman at his side, dear, intrepid little bread-winner, venturing and persisting in spite of blushes and tremors.

They ate their dinner together; and he left her at her school-room door in the afternoon. When she came out again at five o'clock, there he was, seated on a rock near by, whittling a stick.

"It is something in the air," he said. "Whittling is to the woods what cigar-smoking is to the city. See, I have made a whistle. I haven't made one for twenty years, and had almost forgotten how."

He put the whistle to his mouth, and blew it.

"I hope that your sense of fitness may not lead you to seat yourself on the topmost rail of a cedar fence," Miss Shepherd said.

He smiled slightly as he closed with care a wondrous knife that was in itself almost a set of tools, enclosed in one large ivory handle; and he went over her little speech mentally. What a correct little speech it was! She might have given it to her class in grammar as a model. And she was lecturing him, teaching him decorum, the dear little school-mistress! He found it charming. He imagined himself receiving punishment from her, an old-fashioned castigation

with the ferule. She could give a ringing blow, he did not doubt, this future mother of stalwart men.

While thinking, he pocketed his polyglot knife, and threw away the guilty stick.

"Are you inclined to take a little walk?" he asked. "Wouldn't you like to go up and see Mrs. Winter? Poor old soul! She is very solitary; and she is going away soon."

The teacher consented brightly. It was easy to see when she was pleased. Her heavens were all in sight, with their clouds or sunshine, their storms and stars.

They went slowly up the road, the Heath tribe following them.

"Beau!" whispered Samuel; and he assumed such a languishing expression that the others tittered audibly.

Miss Shepherd turned at the sound. "Children, you can go on before," she said; and her glance rested severely for a moment on Samuel, whose innocent, appealing eyes stared wildly at her.

"How does the place look to you?" the doctor asked.

"It is beautiful!" she said with emphasis. "I always thought it picturesque. A good log house is prettier than a poor frame one. This reminds me of an old medal my father has, a gilt bronze medal, with the gilding almost worn off. See, how the sunset flecks it over!"

"It is a perfect comparison!" the doctor said, delighted. "I should think that you have travelled."

"My thoughts and hopes have travelled," said the school-mistress with a faint sigh.

The house was picturesque, especially at that hour. Its bronzed walls rose from a mass of delicate flowers and fresh green. Light birch-groves beyond veiled

the outhouses, and the woods were a noble background. There were many screens made of vine-covered trellises; an oaken crown showed at one point; a curve of emerald grass at another; or a gray stone wall; or a fence of cedar poles; or a curve of brown road.

"I should like to live in a house like that," the teacher said.

"Would you?" exclaimed the doctor. "Would you?"

"Very much!" replied Mary Shepherd with composure.

"Our house at home has an idea of this. It is brown, and covered with vines."

On their way back to Perry's the doctor led Miss Shepherd to speak of her family. He had already prepared the way by speaking of his own with great frankness, and had awakened her sympathy by the tearful tribute he paid to his aunt and benefactress.

Mr. Shepherd had been Miss Martin's legal adviser, had visited her place more than once, and had drawn up her will; therefore her nephew and heir could scarcely be quite a stranger to Mr. Shepherd's daughter.

She described their household with the pleasure of an exile who finds at length a countryman of his own.

Her father had a great deal of business; but he had a generous hand and eight children, and these did not permit him to become rich. She, Mary, was the fourth child. Anne, the eldest, had been married several years, and had two children. Anne had kept school a whole year in the town of Shepherdsville, and earned money enough to buy her own wedding things. Anne's husband was a member of the State legislature. Andrew, her eldest brother, was to be a lawyer, and was studying with his father. Andrew had a good deal

of vim. Jane, two years older than herself, helped mother at home.

"I wanted to assist father a little by partly supporting myself," she said. "This is my fourth school. I began when I was fifteen years old. I buy and make all my own and Kitty's clothes. Kitty is the baby. She is only five."

The doctor looked down at her clothing as she spoke. He had often examined machinery with interest, and studied the branches and boughs of trees; but it had never occurred to him to look and see how a woman's garments are made. What a number of stitches in the white muslin sun-bonnet, with all its slender reeds, and the tiny ruffle at the edge! And what skill in cutting! And the brown and white gingham dress, with its hem, gathers, bands, all the seams that followed so well the noble lines of the wearer's figure, her pretty hand had fashioned it, and travelled over it all, two motions for every one of those tiny stitches! Why was the neck curved downward a half-inch at the back? and why did the lines of the long waist, after sloping nearly their whole length, move straightly for an inch, then make a faint curve outward? Why, it was grace! It was high art! It was the result of artistic study! It was wonderful! He found himself wishing that he could get one of Mary Shepherd's dresses to himself, and study it from the neck to the hem.

"The mother of Christ was a seamstress," he said.

"Yes," replied the teacher. "And He must have learned from her that one should not put new cloth into old garments. I think He would like to let her teach Him all the little things she knew. He may have been sitting by her while she mended, seeing what poor humble things mortals have to do, and

asking why and how. He would be a little boy sitting with His head on a level with her knee, a sober little boy with a low voice. I've often thought of it."

The doctor took his hat off, and stood uncovered.

Presently they seated themselves on a mossy rock, in sight of Perry's, and talked again of the Shepherd family, till the doctor seemed to see them all. He imagined their busy, industrious lives, their economies, their managements; the young heads about the table, the breezy girls chatting, singing, calling through the house; the pale mother, "not very well," under all these cares; Andrew ordering about, and having all his own way; and Henry, whom the doctor would have liked to shake, though his sister spoke of him pityingly. "Poor Henry" was dissatisfied, and didn't know what to do. Father couldn't afford to send him to college.

"Why doesn't he keep school, as you do?" the doctor asked. "Men are paid twice as much as women. He could pay his own way through college so. I've known men to do it."

"So have I," the teacher replied, with a troubled look. "But poor Henry doesn't seem to have a talent that way. Father helped himself so. Grandfather Shepherd had a great deal of land — Shepherdsville was named for him; but he hadn't much money. Almost everybody had land in those days, so there wasn't much of a market near. Mother came from another town, Castine on the sea. Her grandfather was English, and his grandfather was a duke. Mother's grandfather came over in colony times, and had a township given him. He was a younger son. Well, I was going to say, father used to study his Latin at night, after all the family were abed, when he had worked by day. He studied in the kitchen when it

was winter, with a pitch-pine knot set up in the great chimney for a light; and he says that even now, when he reads Virgil and some other of his early books, he seems to smell pitch-pine and see a great glare of red light. By day he sometimes worked on the farm, and declined Latin nouns while mowing grass: and he says that he fixed himself with some in a bad accent, because the syllable at the end of the scythe-swing came out with a jerk."

"It seems to me that Henry lacks energy, and needs a little shaking-up," the doctor said. "You mustn't coddle him too much. It often happens in large families, where the girls are in the majority, that they get the spirit away from the boys. You have got Henry's portion in addition to your own."

"I have no more than I need," she said. "Sometimes I don't seem to have enough — when the larger boys are unruly, or when — " She broke off the sentence.

"Or when the school-committee man comes," the doctor added.

She smiled slightly, but said nothing. It did not become her to laugh at Deacon Heath, except in the privacy of her own family, with the domestic audience well shut in; when, doubtless, the examination scene would be made the subject of much mirth.

A bird which had its nest in the tree over their heads came flying home, paused in the air on whirring wings to view them, concluded that all was right, and, sinking to its wide-mouthed nestlings, gave them their supper.

Doctor Martin was taking a new mental measure of his companion in view of her noble ancestry, and saying to himself that noble blood and high character are two forces which may give an impetus for centuries to

the descendants of him who possesses them. He had seen a few of these well-born Americans. Descended from a more chivalric England than the nineteenth century shows, they yet preserved, in some of their members, at least, the idea of *noblesse oblige* and something of that adventurous eagle spirit which had first prompted their bold flight across the sea.

The girl beside him was something more than beautiful to him, something more than a girl for whom he had conceived a sudden passionate affection. She was a typical New England woman, a product of culture set down alone with nature, refined and laborious, spirited and innocent.

They went to the house, and the teacher disappeared into her room, coming out with her hair newly coiled up, and a spray of silken aspen-leaves in place of the discarded cedar spray. When supper was over, she retired again. But when the long twilight began to lose its rose tints, all the family gathered about the door, inside and out, on the step, on the woodpile, and in the entry. This was their summer evening drawing-room.

The doctor sat beside Miss Shepherd on the doorstep. He had spread a shawl for her to sit on, and requested her to lay a handkerchief on her head.

"He don't seem to mind *my* catching cold," Mrs. Perry whispered facetiously to her husband.

It was evident to them all that the school-mistress had got a "beau."

The large gibbous moon shone whitely, the forest rustled with a sound of steps, perhaps, as well as foliage, and faintly from afar could be heard the howl of a wolf.

The doctor spoke of his travels, describing scenes which, to his fascinated hearers, seemed to belong to

another planet. Mr. Perry and Isaac smoked long clay pipes, interrupting their audible puffing now and then with a "Sho!" or "You don't say so!" The children leaned on their elbows, and listened with eyes, mouth, and ears. Mrs. Perry knit rapidly on a stocking in the dim entry-way, her position defined by the snapping of her needles.

"I don't see how you can put up with *us*, after all that," she remarked, somewhat jealously, in one of the pauses.

"I value America all the more for what I have seen abroad," the doctor said; "though I am sometimes afraid that we may not grow better as we grow older."

"Who knows what our children may do when we are dead and gone!" said Mr. Perry mournfully between two whiffs of his pipe.

"They will probably do what we teach them to do while we are here and alive," the doctor said.

"Who knows what to teach 'em?" said Mrs. Perry, in an injured tone. "Here's Amandy sot on goin' to a cotton factory, because Nancy Winter's gone, and gets two dollars a week. I don't know what to do about it. She's sot on goin'."

"I like to see a girl willing to help herself," said their visitor; "but I think that Amanda would be very foolish to go to a factory to work. The work is hard, the place unwholesome."

"Besides," added the school-mistress, "it will spoil your complexion, and make you look thin and old."

Under her freckles Amanda had a skin like an apple-blossom, as she well knew, and the warning of the school-mistress was more terrible to her than any argument the doctor could bring forward.

"You do need something more than you have," he

added. "You ought to have a singing-school, a band, and a debating society."

Mrs. Perry spoke in a depressed tone. "Who's to start 'em?"

The doctor almost uttered aloud the answer that woke in his heart: "Mary and I!" as he turned quickly toward the girl beside him.

"It's a pity they have so few amusements and opportunities of meeting," she said, thinking that he wanted her opinion. "Of course it does need some one to make a start. I should think that the Haslems might do something. I find that all the young people want to go away."

"Yes; that's the trouble," said Mr. Perry. "They all want to go away. Here's Isaac, now, has got a notion into his head that he might do better out West. They say that a good many folks are going out there."

"Why not try to improve the place where you were born?" the doctor asked. "It is likely that there may be a great tide of travel and prosperity westward; but wait and you will see fortune's tide swashing back again. Keep what you've got, and try to build up your native place. It would be a pity to cut down such trees as these, if a fine wholesome society is not to be planted in their stead."

"It *is* a pooty piece of woods," Mr. Perry remarked, glancing about, and ceasing for a moment to puff smoke out of his mouth.

They rose to go in, and the doctor ventured to offer his hand to the school-mistress in bidding her good-night. She had become very silent. Had his stories made her life seem too dull? Did she dream how one as beautiful as she might be adored in that society where beauty is a power?

She gave him her hand with a serious "Good-night!" and went to her chamber.

The next day again they walked to and from school together; and at evening there was another gathering about the door-step. But this time the doctor was not chief speaker. Mrs. Perry told ghost stories, and stories of signs and warnings; and Mr. Perry told of adventures with bears and wolves, and of a caged fox which went mad like a dog, and bit a man, who afterward died of hydrophobia. Then he related his adventures as stage-driver, and entertained them with break-downs, snow-blocks, and strange passengers.

The doctor followed with a German ghost-story.

"And now it is your turn," he said to the teacher.

Miss Shepherd declared that she did not know a story worth telling.

"She can sing," Mrs. Perry said; and they all raised their voices emphatically: "Yes, the mistress can sing!"

She had, in fact, a voice like a lark's, full, strong, and ringingly clear. She was the unsalaried *prima donna* of the Shepherdsville Congregational choir, which now mourned her absence; and only the Sunday before she had electrified the assembled worshippers of Four Corners by singing Mendelssohn's trio, "Lift thine eyes," with the Misses Haslem. The congregation had heard it sung before, and thought it very pretty; but when Mary Shepherd sang it every heart was thrilled. "It should be sung firmly, not softly," she insisted. "It is an assurance, not a lullaby. 'Thy keeper will never slumber,' is addressed to struggling men and women, not to a baby in its cradle;" and she had sung accordingly.

"It was like Miriam singing to the Israelites," Deacon Heath said when they came out of the meet-

ing-house: and as music plays upon each of us according to the instrument that we are, he had walked home through the lonely woods in a state of stern religious fervor, and sent his son Samuel into the house to study his Bible upside-down.

"I will sing, though I am afraid that you will find my style rustic," Mary Shepherd said in answer to the doctor's request, and, without more ado, sang Moore's "Meeting of the Waters."

Her voice trembled a little; but there was an exquisite pathos in the slowly murmured song, of which every word seemed to be weighed like a jewel.

As the last one died away, Mr. Perry drew the back of his hand across his eyes; and an audible sniff replaced the sound of Mrs. Perry's knitting-needle in the dim entry. Dr. Martin turned toward the singer as she ended, drew a quick breath as if to speak, and turned away again without having spoken.

Mary wiped her own eyes, and smiled, well pleased with her audience. "And now you are going to sing us the 'Marseillaise,'" she said to the doctor.

He roused himself and sang, but with less of spirit than he might have shown in a less softened mood.

The young Perrys nudged each other and tittered; and at the end Mrs. Perry uttered a wondering "Lor'!" She had suspended her knitting, and listened throughout with scarcely less amusement than her children displayed. Her secret thought was that she should be dreadfully ashamed to pronounce such gabbling words as those before folks.

"Mighty cur'us language!" Mr. Perry remarked.

"Now, mistress, sing us 'The Breaking Waves,'" he added.

A swallow or a thrush darts away at a breath; but

the eagle makes a pause before its lifted wings can strike the air.

"I cannot sing that hymn sitting," the teacher said, and, getting up, walked off to a little distance. "Talk! Don't mind me!" she called back.

Her white dress glimmered and disappeared under the trees; and the company she left began obediently to talk. Presently she re-appeared from another direction, and, standing under a broad oak-tree facing them, flung her first electric notes into the air. They flashed out with a sudden brightness that gave a shock to the listeners, —

> "The breaking waves dashed high
> On a stern and rock-bound coast!
> And the woods against a stormy sky
> Their giant branches tossed."

Her voice might well have gone back from the oak-tree above her to those Plymouth woods, leaping like the sacred fire from Ilium back to Ida; and "the sounding aisles of the dim woods" about her did, indeed, ring back to her wild, sweet singing.

Ending, she disappeared again under the trees.

Dr. Martin had heard all the great singers of his time, but he had never before felt the full power of song. How trivial seemed their bird-like trills and mimicry of domestic sentiment and passion compared with this story of heroic adventure with a sublime motive, sung in the very voice of heroism! "She would have come out with the Puritans." he thought. "She would have been the first to stir them up to such a pilgrimage."

Presently the teacher came and seated herself on the step again. She held a cluster of elder-flowers in her hand, and the sweet perfume of it was diffused

around her as she came. "It looked like a moon gone to sleep there in the dark," she said. "I was almost afraid that it might wake up and burn my fingers."

The doctor looked steadily at the fair downcast face beside him. How lovely she was with that faint nimbus shining round her bronze hair where the moon lay! The bright line curved from ear to ear. What pretty ears! He would buy two pear-shaped pearls for them, though they should cost the half of his fortune, and they should be hung so as not to pierce through those rosy lobes. Every nerve of him was resolute to have this soft, white, fiery creature for his own.

"You have never had your ears bored?" he asked abruptly, and touched the one next him.

"No," she replied, with a glance of surprise which was the gentlest of checks.

"I fancy," he went on, "that the ear and the voice may be in harmony, and that a well-shaped ear goes with a sensitiveness to musical sounds. I must examine the subject."

While they talked a discussion had been going on in the family. Mr. and Mrs. Perry wished their daughter Amanda to sing, and their two guests had already said what politeness required. After a good deal of hanging back, she yielded to paternal authority, and brought forth her accordion.

"Oh!" sighed the doctor. He had not expected an accordion. Amanda sang with a certain rustic skill, in a voice not naturally bad. She sang a lamentable ballad of a false young woman who, having engaged to marry a good young man, basely deserted him for a richer suitor. This rich suitor won her by the promise of two gown-patterns (she pronounced the

word patron), one "in hand," the other to be given on their wedding-day. The story was told by the deserted lover himself; and he ended by declaring his intention to dress himself "in some forsaken hue," and go away where no one would hear of him more. It was, evidently, a story founded on fact.

The doctor was one of those happy mortals who find a grain of gold in every sand-heap. "You must go to singing-school," he said. "Your voice is high soprano."

Inebriated by the musical atmosphere about him, Mr. Perry intimated that he also could sing. He had been a sailor in a coasting-vessel in his youth, and he consented to favor the company with a sea-song.

Doubtless he ran up the ropes in those days with more agility than he now displayed in reaching the higher notes of his song, to which he hoisted himself with an effort; and sometimes the note cracked as he caught it, but his voice was heavy and solemn, and the air he sang had the changes of a storm-wind with that indefinable suggestion of the supernatural so often felt in sea-songs.

They separated late that night. The doctor was going to Shepherdsville the next morning with Isaac. He had business there, he said, but did not explain that his chief errand was to make acquaintance with Mary Shepherd's family.

She sent letters and messages to them by him, and watched him go away with tears in her eyes. "I should so like to see them all!" she explained to Mrs. Perry, who saw her wipe the tears away.

It still lacked an hour of school-time, for the stage had started as soon as their early breakfast was over; and the teacher shut herself into her bedroom again. As she entered, her eyes fell upon an object that she

surely had not left there. It was a single large white flower-de-luce in a tumbler of water. She had left the door open, having put her room in order at early dawn; so there was no great trespass on the part of him who had placed the flower on her little table.

Dr. Martin had taken a rather long walk before the sun was up, in search of this flower. Isaac had said the day before at table that the plant was to be found in a meadow nearly a mile away. She knew well who must have got it for her, and blushed with pleasure as she stood at a little distance admiring its proud, pure beauty.

Then she went near, and bent over it; and as she did so, her blush swept up again. For there was an inscription in rose-color on one of the shining white petals.

The doctor had found her box of colors and brushes on the parlor mantel-piece, and had painted these words with crimson on the flower he offered: —

"To the sweetest and noblest of women."

It was her first love-letter.

"He is very complimentary!" she said with dignity. "He is very kind!" she added. And she trembled.

CHAPTER XV.

"CHAINS OF LOVE BINDING."

Doctor Martin knew enough about domestic affairs in modest households not to make that odious thing, a morning call, on the Shepherd family. But he passed by on the other side of the street, and made a brief reconnoissance of the premises.

He saw a long brown cottage with picturesque additions, all draped in woodbine and honeysuckle, and with plenty of garden room about it.

Having got this pleasing picture of his lady's home, he went to see the town. It was a pretty, thriving white village, which owed its prosperity entirely to the lumber trade, and where the whole river and river-street were given up to lumber. From half a dozen saw-mills could be heard day and night the harsh d-z-z-z of the saws and the mellow crash of the wine-colored fall. Down the long, dusty road, a slow procession, came the great lumber-wagons, a blinding yellow-white in the sunshine. Below the town were wharves piled high with planks and boards; there were vessels going out laden to the water's edge; and all the river was whitened with saw-dust and lath-edgings. Above the mills the river was black with logs floated down from northern forests. When they came down with the ice in the spring, they would sometimes crowd and rear their heads like leviathans, threatening boom, mills, and bridge.

To run across the river on the logs that bobbed

under their feet was the darling pastime of venturesome boys; and to steal away to the saw-mills, and have a ride on the carriage beside the great log that was being sawn, hitching slowly down almost out over the river, and sliding quickly back almost into the jaws of the machine — this was the tremulous, wild adventure of spirited girls.

Dr. Martin saw all these things, and viewed the town from every point, and asked questions concerning its trade from the chief tradesmen, and sounded two or three of the wealthiest inhabitants on the subject of a railroad, and learned the price of land and produce and stock and many other things. Then he knocked at the door of the vine-covered cottage, and was shown into what seemed to him a Dorcas society, gathered in a very pleasant sitting-room.

Mrs. Shepherd was seated in a high-backed rocking-chair, basting some work, and Kitty sat on a stool at her feet, sewing patch-work. Jane stood before a table, cutting out some garment by a set of complicated patterns. Helen was sewing by a window, and Julia had laid down her work to open the door.

Their visitor saw where Mary had learned her deportment when Mrs. Shepherd rose to meet him with a rather grand politeness.

"*She* shall not grow old like that," he thought, as he bowed before this gray and faded model of the beautiful teacher.

He introduced himself, and presented Mary's letter.

Instantly all faces brightened. The sisters began to question him, while Mrs. Shepherd read. They had placed him an arm-chair opposite their mother, and the young ones all clustered around. They spoke of his aunt, whom they had seen, and she became another link to draw them together.

It was more than pleasant for him to sit in their midst; see how neat, and modest, and intelligent they were; hear them call their sister Molly, and "poor Mame," and pity her for being off there in the woods.

"She is the flower of them all," he thought.

"I hated to have her go," the mother said, folding her letter. "But our family is large, and Mary wanted to help her father."

"Oh! she is getting along bravely!" the doctor declared with a cheerful face. Then he described Perry's, the school, the deacon, his long walks with Mary, and Mary's singing. He told them that he already knew their names, and who made Kitty's dresses, and that he found them strange in only one respect. All had dark hair. Where had Mary got her beautiful auburn locks?

"From me," said Mrs. Shepherd, touching her own gray hair, which had yet faint clouds of brown, but not a tinge of gold. The gold is first to go.

He had to stay to supper with them, and Mrs. Shepherd sent out to invite her father to bear them company.

The doctor was impressed by the face and manner of this gentleman, who was not the great-grandson of a duke for nothing. He was a grandfather calculated to give a girl position in society, small, finely Roman-nosed, clear and somewhat sarcastic of speech, and ceremoniously courteous. Mr. Jennings had spent several years in Europe in his youth.

Then came Mary's father, a gentleman of another type, dark, unassuming, and with signs of quiet humor.

Never had the doctor spent a more delightful evening; and when he went to his hotel, escorted by both Mr. Jennings and his son-in-law, he mentally declared

that he had never known a more charming family. "Why, there isn't their equal in Southport," he thought.

And then his thoughts flew off to their absent treasure. "Bless her beautiful head!" he said. "May the trees wave lightly, the sunshine fall softly, and the wind touch her tenderly!"

The doctor had said a good deal about his family and his own affairs that evening; and but for a suspicion which began to dawn on Mr. Shepherd's mind, and which had already reached high noon in the minds of his wife and daughters, this frankness might have seemed a little odd. The lawyer listened to him with the strict attention which he was wont to give to a client stating his case; and the longer he listened, the more he became convinced that there was a case to try.

Nor had he long to wait, for on saying good-night to him the doctor asked the favor of a personal interview the next day "on particular business."

"Molly has done pretty well," the father thought as he went homeward.

And so it happened that two days after, as Mary was in her school-house, setting copies in the writing-books after the children were gone home, there was a step at the door, and Doctor Martin entered.

"Oh, you have come back!" she said, and rose to meet him.

He gave her a package of letters. "Don't read them here," he said. "Come out."

He had come feeling almost sure of success. Mr. Shepherd had told him frankly that they could not hope for a better match for Mary, and the family had received him with enthusiasm. Mary was not engaged; and, so far from giving encouragement to any

of the young men who approached her, she had "turned up her nose at them," her father said. Then the doctor was accustomed to success; and Mary certainly liked him. On taking leave of the Shepherd family, he looked upon the matter as about settled, and Mary his promised bride.

But when he entered her presence again, and found her composed and ceremoniously polite, his heart sank. After all, what had he to build upon? The change of feeling was so abrupt that a momentary faintness came over him; and as they came out of the school-house together, Mary, had she looked at him, would have been startled to see how pale he was. But her eyes turned persistently in some other direction.

"Come down to the cascade," he said. "There you can read your letters, and I will tell you all about the family. I have seen a good deal of them."

There was, possibly, some flutter under the teacher's calm exterior as she locked the school-house door, and went a few steps down the road to where, in a green niche, a slender thread of water fell beside a mossy stone. She had not forgotten the message left on her lily-petal. And if she had not looked to see the change in Doctor Martin's face, she could not be insensible to the emotion betrayed by his voice.

The doctor brushed away some little twigs from the soft moss, and she seated herself, and took first the letter he indicated. It was from her father. She read it through, folded it, and took up the rest without uttering a word or raising her eyes.

The doctor had stood before her, eagerly watching her face; but when he saw the first start and blush, which looked more like alarm than bashfulness, change to a look of determined reserve, he walked away a

few steps, and wandered uneasily up and down. As she folded the letter he stopped again; but when she took up the second, he resumed his walk.

Her mother's letter came next, then Jane's, then Andrew's. They had all written, even Kitty! And how they all praised him! He was manly and honorable. He was handsome, strong, and healthy. He was frank and courageous, kind and true. He was everything that was most amiable and honorable.

Her face softened while she read. Mary Shepherd was not one to find a lover more fascinating for being forbidden. Doctor Martin could have had no greater claim to her affection than this — that he came to her borne, as it were, in the arms of her family. When she read Kitty's pen-printed missive: "I should like to have Dr. James Martin for a brother," with the large O in which an invisible kiss was enclosed for her dear sister Molly, the sister's eyes filled with tears; and those tears were in her eyes as she looked up with a faint smile.

"They all like you so much," she said tremulously.

"Bless you!" he exclaimed. "And you, Mary?"

She rose. "I like you just as they do," she answered, with a sweet reserve, casting her eyes down as she passed him by.

He silently followed her to the open road.

Presently she looked up again. "I thank you!" she said. "You have done me an honor. But, of course, I am not prepared to answer now. We must be better acquainted. Now, tell me how you liked Shepherdsville, and whom you saw there. You came back with Mr. Haslem, didn't you?"

Five happy days went by, in which the lover watched his mistress bending ever more and more toward him. They were constantly together; they

talked of everything but love; they learned all there was to tell each other of their past lives; and Mary began to ask the doctor's advice, and he to direct her in those trifles which may be made to mean so much.

Mrs. Perry thought them a very "cur'us" pair of lovers, and was of opinion that the mistress had become "stuck up" since Doctor Martin had begun to "pay attention" to her. There was no giggling and blushing, and the jokes the family ventured at first were nipped in the bud by an untimely frost. The teacher was lofty and serious, the doctor serious and watchful; and neither of them spoke of the other. A very "cur'us" pair of lovers!

But between the two the bond grew gradually to be taken as a matter of course; and when, on the fifth evening, as they sat on the door-step, and the doctor wrapped her shawl about her, he did not at once withdraw his arm, the teacher made no motion to repel it, but after a while leaned lightly against his shoulder.

And then he knew that he had won her.

The next evening, instead of joining the family on the doorstep, they walked up and down the road together, in sight of the house, but out of hearing.

"That looks a little more *like*," remarked Mrs. Perry. "But I never saw engaged folks so polite to each other. They are as polite as a basket of chips. I don't believe he has kissed her yet."

He had not. But when, two days later, he took leave of them to go to Southport, and Mary Shepherd stood in the yard looking at him, and trying hard to swallow down the tears that would rise, he kissed her tenderly before them all, printing a red spot on

each delicate white cheek, and she clung a moment to his hand.

She was his promised wife then, and they were to be married in the spring. They had other plans, too, which as yet no one suspected. It was to these plans the doctor referred at the last moment.

"Mary," he said, "if you don't believe in it down to the soles of your shoes, don't let us bind ourselves to it!"

She smiled through her tears. "I believe in it down to the centre of the earth!" she answered.

CHAPTER XVI.

WEDDING-CAKE.

The doctor's family did not believe in it. They disliked his engagement; for they had settled that he was to marry Edith Selwyn, and have the Selwyn place. But still less could they endure, or even believe, the second part of his astonishing announcement. They were aghast at the idea of his going to live on Aunt Betsey's township. Was it for that, all his advantages of study and travel!

"Yes; just for that!" he answered.

"It will be the last part of the Pied Piper's story over again," Mr. Francis Elder said. "A later generation will see a troop of people, half savage, and speaking a strange patois, issue from the eastern forests; and it will be said: 'These are the descendants of a Doctor Martin, who was bewitched away from civilization a hundred years ago.' They will say 'haow, naow, and sho'!' and they will call sauce 'sass;' and they will wear blue homespun, sit down to table in their shirt-sleeves, and will eat with their knives."

"I will bet a saddle-horse for your Frank against a white satin wedding-dress for my eldest girl, that my children will speak as good English and have as good manners as yours," the doctor said, not without heat. "And you shall be the judge."

"But who are these people, this Shepherd family?"

Mrs. Elder asked in what she meant for a very aristocratic manner.

"Now, don't! don't!" her brother said, holding up his hands persuasively. "If you should fall from such a height you might hurt yourself!"

"But, who are they?" she repeated rather sharply.

"They are people," replied the doctor, "who, I am anxiously hoping, may find my family as well-bred as themselves."

"Well, really, James!" his mother said, reddening, "I think we may be allowed to make some inquiries, when you tell us that you are going to marry a country school-mistress, who has, it seems, been glad to accept you after only a week's acquaintance."

"She might have had me after twenty-four hours of acquaintance," the doctor said, restraining his anger. "Her father and family accepted me a week before she did. I was afraid she might refuse."

A chorus of derisive laughter answered him.

"Stop that!" he broke out. "I won't have her insulted," and he turned his back upon them.

"Of course we have got to accept her," Mrs. Martin said privately to her daughter. "And we may as well make the best of it. We might invite her to come up here for a month in the autumn or winter, and then talk her over. If she once sees Southport, she will never let James take her into the backwoods to live."

The result was that two letters were written to Miss Mary Shepherd; and very civil letters they turned out to be, to the doctor's contentment.

"She writes a pretty letter, mother," Mrs. Elder said, when the answers came.

The letters were not only pretty. The sweet modesty of the writer touched the hearts that were

angry with her. She thankfully accepted their vague invitation, and would be ready to come when they should send for her.

A few days after New Year's she came, accompanied by her grandfather. The doctor's triumph was complete. If his mother and sister had not melted at once when his beautiful betrothed met them with a blushing, affectionate eagerness, unsuspecting of their reluctance to receive her, and that tremulous, "How I hope that you will not be disappointed in me!" they most certainly would not have dared to freeze in the presence of that very decided, ceremonious, Roman-nosed gentleman, Mr. Jennings, who could not help seeming to do them an honor in consenting to the alliance. But they did melt. They had kind hearts beneath their foolish affectations and ambitions; and before she came they had heard the story of her ancestry.

It amused the doctor to perceive how, in the light of this story, they, and everybody else, found his Mary stately and distinguished-looking. He wondered if the same terms would have been employed if she had been only a country school-mistress and nothing more.

Mary had been invited for a month, and she stayed no longer, though urged to prolong her visit; but Mr. Jennings, who had come only to escort his granddaughter, was persuaded to remain till she returned, being Mr. John Martin's guest.

"The girl is fit for a king," John said; "and I wouldn't object to having such a grandfather myself. I believe he isn't rich; but some way he impresses you as having a palace in town and a castle in the country. As to James's notion of living in that wild place, it is the plan of a visionary idiot. He will get

sick of it in a year or two, and then come back here and find himself entirely cut out in his profession. It is one thing to land from Europe, and another to land from Beechlands down East. The women are already beginning to find Charles Selwyn a sweet doctor. I didn't think James was such a fool. But it is of no use to say anything. He is a stubborn fool."

"You think that you will be content to live in so solitary a place?" softly asked Edith Selwyn of the bride-elect. And she looked at her white, gold-crowned beauty with a melancholy smile.

"Oh, yes!" said Mary. "I am sure that we shall be happy there! Some day when we have made it prettier, I hope that you will come and see us. You would like it for a summer visit."

She had conceived a tender friendship for this quiet girl, whose smile was so faint and sad.

"If you would come and stay a month with me now!" said Edith eagerly.

Mary shook her head. "You are so kind! But I must go home now. I have so much to do. I shall have only three months. You know we are to be married in May."

"We," and always "We!" Edith Selywn sighed, and said no more.

The visit was over, and Mary went home, escorted by her lover half-way. In another month he would go to Shepherdsville to see her; and a week before the wedding he would return with his mother and sister.

His mother and sister were in very high feather about the engagement, and even began to talk of "James's estate," which needed his presence for a while, as it was likely that a railroad would be run

through it soon. And they missed no opportunity of making it known that James was to marry the great-granddaughter of a duke.

"Oh! there are three greats, mother," the doctor would say. "For short, you might say the superlatively great granddaughter."

"She is the superlative great-granddaughter of a duke," Mrs. Martin said with a most flattering emphasis.

They were in family council; and their talk led to English titles, and from those to titles in other lands, and from thence to their foreign travels and impressions, and from thence to the impressions that foreigners have of America.

"I think that in geography we are the only intelligent nation on earth," the doctor said. "Why, our little boys and girls can tell you all the lakes and rivers and cities of every land; while the inhabitants of those lands, — why! even the educated classes hardly seem to know that there is a Mississippi River, or a range of mountains called the Rocky, or a city that would make any show beside their little country towns. When our tourists stare and wander round their half-dead little hill-cities, they don't know that we are wondering at the dinginess and rags; they think it's admiration.

"There was that *sindaco* of Ombra, now. You remember him, Bessie. He was a very fine gentleman; but he gave me the impression of thinking that, though the earth may be round, his side is always uppermost. He expressed the greatest interest in this country, and said that he believed the territory of the United States was somewhat larger than that of Italy. I answered hesitatingly that I thought it might be. I always meant to give him a lesson in some way, but hardly

knew how. Last month Mary gave me an idea, and we carried it out between us. I could not well send the maps to the Signor Alinori himself; so I sent them to the little girl." The doctor laughed. "It will be crushing. There are two maps of the world, giving the two continents. Of course, Italy shows like a wart on the edge of Europe. Then come the separate countries, with the square miles of them printed, the United States cutting all the bulk out of North America. Lastly, a map of the States alone, again with square miles. Those maps will create a sensation in the town of Ombra. I should like to see the Signor Alinori's face when he reads those figures."

And the doctor laughed again.

CHAPTER XVII.

A SMILE.

The large roll of highly colored maps did, indeed, make a sensation in Ombra. Not a notable person there but wished to see them; and as they had been sent to Beatrice in Signor Alinori's care, that gentleman had ample leisure to examine them, and show them to his friends. They hung a full week in the *sindaco's* town drawing-room before being sent to Palazzo Alinori.

For the Signora Anna had carried out her threat; and Beatrice was now acting as companion to the old countess.

The maps were brought there at length, and hung in one of the large ante-chambers; and for a day Beatrice was a sort of heroine as their possessor. The Signor Francesco came, and pointed out the countries with his cane, and told his mother that an Italian had discovered the under half of the world, which she already knew.

But the old countess was scandalized to see Italy so small in comparison to the rest of the world, and thought there must be some mistake.

"Mamma," said the *sindaco*, "which is the larger, your ring, or the diamond that is set in it?"

This happy comparison restored the old lady's complacency, and satisfied her sense of fitness.

The Signora Mattei came to see the strange present that Beatrice had received from America, and gazed

with admiration on the bright and shining pictures, without well understanding them. Her soul, proud science had never taught to stray beyond an only half-credited theory that the earth is round.

Betta, who had accompanied her mistress, was much taken by the map of the United States, which she immediately began to explain. The red-colored parts were, of course, the wine-growing districts; the yellow, the olive countries; and the blue and green, the wheat. Didn't everybody know the agricultural meaning of these colors? And didn't everybody look at the first rainbow of the season to see what the crops were going to be? They had all known that the olives were going to turn out badly the year before, when they saw that rainbow with the narrow yellow streak; while the red of the same rainbow shone so deep a color, and spread out so wide, that it seemed to be on the point of overflowing the sky, just as the wine overflowed their *botti* in the autumn following.

"Ah! the wine doesn't overflow our *botti* any more!" sighed the old countess, shaking her head. "Our best *vigna* is old; and the *contadini* steal half of the rest. I have seen the time when we had to throw away wine because we hadn't wood enough to put it in; and if a passer-by asked a farmer's wife for a glass of water, she would ask him if he wouldn't just as lief take wine, as she had no fresh water in the house."

While speaking, she had been leading the Signora Mattei away for a private conversation in her own chamber. But on the threshold she paused and looked back with an uneasy expression. Only Beatrice and Betta remained in the room; and she did not like to leave them together. There was no knowing what Betta might say to the girl. To be sure, she had sworn by all the saints that she never had and never

would tell her a word about her parents; but perhaps Betta lied.

"Don't you want to go down to the kitchen and see Giuseppina?" the countess asked.

"Oh, yes!" said Betta with alacrity, and hastened to make her way toward the far-off kitchen.

But when the old lady and her companion had disappeared, Beatrice heard her name whispered, and saw Betta's head looking into the anteroom. "Come upstairs!" she said, and made a sign of silence.

The two stole out of the room, and up a narrow stair leading to an attic over the countess's chamber and chapel. Here they were not likely to be surprised; for the family of Tomaso Alinori had their apartment in another part of the palace; and, besides, they could hear when the conference in the room beneath broke up, and be ready to run down.

The attic was large and rough, with dark beams above, and a brick floor. Through interstices in the boarding over the beams could be seen the heavy yellow tiles that covered the roof. There was a small square window under the eaves.

"She wants me to go into a convent!" whispered Beatrice the moment they were inside the place.

"What did you say?" asked Betta anxiously.

"Just as you told me to do, in case she should propose it. I didn't let her see that I was angry; and I said that I should want to think a long time before making up my mind. She talked a good while; but I made no other answer. She said that I should not be hastened. I told her that I had no *dota;* and she said that they would see to that. I told her that Mrs. Nelson didn't want me to enter a convent, and that my pension was paid on condition I shouldn't. She said Mrs. Nelson was a heretic, and her wishes of no

consequence; but that it was true the money might be stopped. I said: 'Mrs. Nelson was, perhaps, a heretic; but she was my benefactress.' Then the countess smiled and kissed me, and said that she was glad to see me grateful. Betta, do you really believe that she had nothing to do with it?"

"Of course I do!" Betta said with emphasis. "But that makes no difference. Her children profit by it."

"I should like to believe in her," the girl said sadly. "She is kind — for a mistress! I said I would not eat with the servants; and she has me eat with her alone. She kisses me morning and night, as I remember Tessa did, and grandmother."

Tears rushed to her eyes, and her voice became choked. To her whom nobody owned, who was not sure of any foothold upon the earth, it was like a shield in time of battle to live with one who kissed her morning and evening. She had had no kisses at any hour of the day at Francesco Alinori's.

"She ought to be good to you," Betta said. "She is your father's aunt; and she expects Checco Alinori to have your name and property."

Beatrice's brows darkened, and the tears sank out of sight as if they had withdrawn to their fountain again. Betta smiled at the sight.

"Don't let yourself be flattered!" she whispered sharply. "Don't let them make any plans for you. Keep free; but be secret. Let them think that perhaps you will one day enter a convent. By and by, some proper man will marry you, and get your inheritance back. It needs a strong man, some one who has friends; and if he hates the Alinori, all the better. It must never be suspected that you think of marrying. They would be afraid of your husband."

"Don Leonardo hates me," the girl said dreamily.

Betta lifted her head with a start, and sat staring at Beatrice. Her eyes snapped with the sudden entrance of a new train of thought into her mind. "What does he do?" she asked.

"He never speaks first, and he looks at me in a queer way, and looks away quickly when he thinks that I notice him; and he doesn't stay alone in the room with me." She tried to recollect the many small items composing that mountain of evidence which had been more than enough to convince herself.

Betta's hand was on her arm. "Never let him know that you think so!" she whispered. "Pretend to think that he likes you. Smile when you see him. Speak to him whenever you get a chance. Make much of him, but don't give him a chance to say anything against you. There's something I didn't tell you. You know that he was in love with your mother, but never offered to marry her till just before you were born. Your mother refused him scornfully. I heard it all, and she told me besides. He came secretly in the evening, and returned to worry her as soon as her child was born. It was after that that he talked against her, and said that he knew nothing of the marriage, and didn't believe it."

"He talked against her!" exclaimed Beatrice with anger blazing out in her eyes.

"Hush!"

Betta glanced about, bent her neck to see that the outer door was securely shut, then whispered into Beatrice's ear the last insult that her mother had had to bear, and that there were persons who believed, or pretended to believe, that Don Leonardo was her own father.

There was not a word of reply. Her story was

listened to in a perfect silence that was almost stupor. The girl's slender shoulders seemed even to bend, as if she felt a physical weight from the heaped-up burdens that fell, one by one, on her heart.

"Don't mind it, dear!" said Betta soothingly. "Some day we'll pay him. Wait till you get a clever husband to right you. But now, pretend to know nothing. Be as sweet with him as you can. Never, for your life, let him know that I have told you anything. If the subject should ever come up, let them believe that you think there is no proof of your mother's marriage."

Beatrice nodded. She could not speak.

Betta put her hand to the floor in front of them, and softly picked up two frayed ends of soiled tape that were tucked down, one at either side of one of the bricks. Till she pulled them up, showing an inch or two of tape at either side, they might have been passed over unnoticed, as bits of lint fallen into the interstices. Taking them, then, firmly and carefully, she lifted the brick they surrounded, and laid it noiselessly by her side.

These floors are usually made of two thicknesses of bricks, sustained on slender beams of wood between larger ones, the beam supporting the joining of the bricks; and a more treacherous floor and ceiling would be hard to invent. The bricks may be plastered or papered underneath, but are often only whitewashed or painted.

As Betta lifted the upper brick from its place, two small round holes were disclosed in the lower one, and through those holes came the sound of voices. The countess had taken their visitor into the chapel for greater privacy. Betta bent her head to the perforated brick, and listened.

"I want to do as well as I can for the child," the countess was saying, "and I can think of nothing else. As a nun, she begins a new life, and takes a new name. Her past will be forgotten, and she might reach a high position. But in the world, what can she do? Her *dota* is not enough to get any but a poor man, and a poor man with any ambition wouldn't want to marry a nameless girl. I should be sorry to see her the wife of a *contadino*, forced to labor all her life. But she is doomed to that, if she does not become a nun."

"It might be best," the Signora Mattei said slowly, as if considering the matter, while she inwardly raged at the "*contadino*" and "doomed." "As you say, she might rise to be a superior in some convent. Of course you would give her all your influence."

"Oh, yes!" the countess said eagerly. She was most anxious to secure the Signora Mattei's influence and to show her own good will. The existence of Beatrice was a thorn in her hopes and her conscience. In the depths of her soul she knew that she and her sons were robbing the girl.

"You can speak to her about it when you have a chance," she said, laying a hand on the visitor's arm, and smiling affectionately. "Beatrice thinks so much of you, and we all love her. Of course she isn't to know that we have spoken together on the subject. I am sorry to find that she is a little suspicious in disposition. It is almost the only fault she has. Though Checco's wife tells me that she is coquettish."

"Checco's wife is jealous of everything in the shape of a woman," said the Signora Mattei angrily. "I declare I hardly dare to be civil with her husband when she is by."

The countess sighed. "What could you expect from her birth?" she said, seeming to forget that the person she addressed had come from the same class. "Poor Nanna was not brought up to be treated with courtesy by gentlemen. The courtesy that a lady receives as a matter of course from her gentleman acquaintances she had seen paid only in love-making."

Betta hastily and noiselessly replaced the brick, for the scraping of a chair told that her mistress had risen to terminate a conversation which could scarcely be pleasing to her.

"Mind what I tell you about Don Leonardo," she whispered. "Make much of him! Make much of him! But never stay alone with him one moment."

She tiptoed down the stair with a light foot, and reached the kitchen three minutes before she was called to accompany her mistress. And when the two ladies came out into the anteroom where they had left Beatrice, she was still there, quietly sewing by a window.

She rose respectfully when they appeared, and smiled at their approach; but when the Signora Mattei took her hand in saying good-by, her own was grasped with a sudden force which almost drew a cry from her. "Oh! Oh! Signora!" murmured Beatrice, trembling.

The countess had left them for a moment.

"Don't be afraid, Bice!" the visitor whispered, kissing her. "You shall never go into a convent."

The countess returned with Betta, and the visitor departed.

"Bice, dear," the countess said, "would you go up into the garden and get me a half-dozen of the best lemons you can find? I want them for Fra Antonio. Then we will go down and carry them."

Beatrice wondered at herself that the ready smile came dimpling to her lips as she rose to obey. She knew that, without having made an effort, her face expressed contentment and affection; yet her heart was as a stone to this woman and all her household.

She went upstairs to the garden, which was on a level with the second story, the palace being on the hillside of the street. It was a long garden supported in the usual way by a stone wall and buttresses against the house on the lower side, and shut in by a high stone wall that supported the street on the upper side. There were flowers, cultivated chiefly to please the daughters of Tomaso Alinori, whose family was all daughters; but nearly all the land was thriftily given over to the production of food. A fig-tree, two or three olive-trees, a peach and an apricot tree, served for fruit. A grape-walk was jealously guarded for the barrel of *vin santo* the countess always made in the house, and the lemons from the half-dozen lemon-trees were nearly all sold to the one confectioner in the town.

These lemon-trees were now under cover in a rough glass-house built against the upper wall of the garden, where they ripened in the south sun, which, even in winter, gave them a few tropical hours every clear day.

Beatrice searched among the shining leaves, thick hung with hard, green balls, for some which should have begun to yellow; and looking so, now from one side, now from another, she glanced toward the house, and saw Don Leonardo sitting by a window looking over some papers.

Palazzo Alinori was so apportioned that each of its independent inmates had an apartment; and that of Don Leonardo was across one end from street to

garden. Beatrice had gone up by a stair at the other end of the palace; but the lemons were opposite Don Leonardo's windows.

She looked at him steadfastly, growing old as she gazed. He had slandered her mother vilely, and slandered her to death. Betta had said that the Signora Beatrice went into convulsions and died on hearing what he had said. He had robbed her own life of all honor and all ease. Every pain she had ever suffered was because of him. What else had he done? What else did he know?

"Who killed my father?" she whispered through her teeth, gazing fiercely at him.

He bent lower over his papers.

"Who killed my father?" she repeated, her eyes fixed upon his face.

He looked up quickly from the papers in his hand and glanced about, as if he had been called. His eyes roved over the garden, but did not see the figure motionlessly watching him from behind the lemon-trees. He looked up at the sky, and, rising, down into the dark court below; but no one was in sight.

He returned to his papers.

"Could he have heard me?" Beatrice thought, trembling with fear. "No; that was impossible. But why did he look about so? I must try to please him, as Betta told me."

She gathered the lemons into her apron, and went out into the garden. "If he looks at me, I will smile," she thought. "Then he will know that I said nothing ugly to him. I will try to find a rose."

She looked at him once more, to be sure that he did not see her, then ran back the length of the garden, and slowly returned.

Don Leonardo perceived her after a while, and

frowned as he drew back a little out of sight, and sat looking at her. And, as he looked, the frown presently relented, and an expression of surprise and interest took its place.

Beatrice was not beautiful, but had the promise of a fine, spirited beauty. She was tall, and, though beautifully shaped and proportioned, was too slender as yet. Her waist was round, but absurdly small; her arms round, but fleshless. Her complexion was not clear, and she had no color in her cheeks. But beautiful waves of dark chestnut hair covered her head, and curled low on an exquisite forehead; fine white teeth filled her red-lipped, sweetly sensuous mouth; and extraordinarily brilliant dark eyes looked warily out from under a stern, straight pair of brows, that seemed to change their shape and arch themselves when she smiled.

But it was not so much a perception of her dawning beauty which kept Don Leonardo's eyes fixed on the girl, as the fact that she was lingering there from some hidden motive. Of course, the motive was a man or a boy, according to his mind. He was incapable of imagining any other. And for once he was partly in the right, though grossly in error as to the nature of her seeming coquetry.

"Whom is she flirting with?" he muttered, calling her an evil name, not from anger, but from the habit of a bad tongue.

He watched her eyes, but they looked only at the trees. He glanced along the house-fronts high above the garden, and saw no one; and he could recollect no young man living there who seemed likely to attract her interest. The buildings were chiefly convents. The chambers over his own were store-rooms and servants' bedrooms only. The cook was a rather hand-

some young fellow, and the kitchen looked out on the garden. Could she be displaying herself for him? No; she was too proud for that. The tacit firmness with which she had always held herself aloof from the servant class, preferring solitude to their company, had been remarked in the family, and, though seldom commented on verbally, had caused many a significant glance among them.

Suddenly Beatrice seemed to remember that she was neglecting some duty. The smile changed to seriousness, and she hastened to the house.

Her nearest way was by a stair in front of Don Leonardo's window. She skipped lightly toward it, her short dress suffering a pair of very neat feet to be seen, and her quick motion tossing thick waves and rings of dark hair about her forehead. As she reached the stair, she glanced upward at the same moment that he stepped nearer to watch her.

Instantly a bright smile lit up her face. With a quick, graceful gesture, she held out the corners of her apron to display its contents; then ran lightly downstairs, and disappeared into the house.

He stood confounded. Never before had she smiled in looking at him, or volunteered a remark or salutation.

Don Leonardo was now fifty years of age, and a fine-looking man, though his face bore evident marks of dissipation. He was tall, well made and blond, and could assume an agreeable, even fascinating, manner. It was by no means difficult for him to believe that he had made a conquest.

But, of this girl! It was outrageous to think of! The possibility did not at first please even his unscrupulous vanity. He sat down and stared blankly out of his window again, his thoughts busy with the past.

"What a fool Paulo was to marry a girl of that class!" he muttered. "It was all his own fault!"

He threw his papers aside. The shirt of Nessus was upon him.

"I had nothing to do with it!" he whispered, shaking his fist at an invisible adversary. "The fellow wanted to buy a little piece of garden-land next to his house, and I lent him the money, thirty *scudi*. He never paid it. The other hated Paulo. Paulo got him five years in the galleys, and he had just come out."

He became aware that he was talking aloud, and cast a fearful glance around; then seated himself, and took up his papers again. But, instead of reading and writing, as before, he began to make certain letters and flourishes with a slow, painstaking hand. R, and again R, and at last the whole name — Randini. When he had finished a certain flourish at the last letter, even a person well acquainted with the advocate Randini's signature would have believed it his autograph.

Again the papers were flung aside. Don Leonardo dressed himself to go out. But, instead of going by the nearest way, he passed through a corridor leading to his mother's apartment and the grand stairway. He had got a new package of snuff as strong as pepper, just the sort his mother liked; and he wanted to fill her box, so he told himself.

The truth was that he wanted to see Beatrice again.

Ventura was passing the corridor.

"Where is mamma?" asked Don Leonardo, arrogantly. He was beginning to dislike this fellow. He was too handsome a servant to have in a house where there were young girls. And what was he hanging about the corridors for?

"The Signora is in the chapel with her confessor,"

the cook said, obsequiously. "Fra Luigi came just as she was going out."

"Very well!" Don Leonardo looked with a scowling brow at the young man, who smilingly retired kitchenward. Then he bethought himself of the maps.

"Let us improve our minds!" he muttered with a laugh, and went to the anteroom where they hung.

Beatrice sat there by a window with her sewing. The room led to the apartment of the old countess, and she was waiting for Fra Luigi to come out.

Don Leonardo paused on the threshold and looked at the child. She rose immediately, and smiled; but it was not the bright, almost familiar smile he had received an hour before. She wore an air of respectful reserve. "The Signora is at confession, Don Leonardo," she said.

He nodded, and went toward the maps. "I want to find something here," he said, half over his shoulder. He felt a certain embarrassment, and knew not how to treat this girl, whom he had heretofore passed without notice.

Beatrice resumed her seat, and bent her head over her work again. The furtive glance he cast her now and then found her apparently unconscious of his presence. Two or three times he opened his mouth to address her, but shut it without having uttered a word. And so after a few minutes his mother and her confessor, coming out, found him.

"I am searching for the western boundary line of Turkey," he said, with a very studious look.

"The western boundary line of Turkey!" repeated the countess, glancing rapidly from her son to Beatrice, and from her back to him again.

"The western boundary line of Turkey!" said Fra Luigi, glancing in his turn from the man to the girl,

and back again, as he slowly inhaled a pinch of snuff. "It is a very movable line, I believe!" And he went to assist Don Leonardo in his search.

"Do you find it so, *reverendissimo padre?*" asked Don Leonardo, still studying the map. "Perhaps, then, I had better not waste any more time in searching. Mamma, I have brought you some tobacco."

The old lady smilingly produced her box; and Fra Luigi, looking on while it was being filled, repented him of his significant speech. It was beautiful snuff, and his box was almost empty.

The countess offered him a pinch.

"Oh! I will fill your box, too," Don Leonardo said to the monk. He had been thinking that it might be just as well to conciliate him. He was aware that he was not in very good odor with the *frati*, though he scrupulously performed his Easter duties, telling some one of them all the sins which they knew that he had committed, with as many extenuating circumstances as he could invent. As for the sins which he had been able to conceal — "Let them find them out for themselves, if they will!" he said.

Fra Luigi took his snuff with a satisfied face; and the two went out together. Don Leonardo, bowing to his mother from the threshold, glanced at the silent figure in the window. Her work suspended in her hand, she stood looking after them; and as she met his glance, a smile full of innocent sweetness greeted him.

"Has Leonardo been talking to you, Bice?" the countess asked her the moment they were alone.

"No, Signora. He only said that he wanted to look at the maps."

"You had better not sit here when you are alone,"

the old lady went on. "Everybody who comes passes through this room."

"Don't you want me to see people?" Beatrice asked in a quiet tone, her face closely bent over her work.

The countess glanced at her sharply. Was it possible that the girl was making a cutting remark?

"It isn't proper that a young girl should remain alone with gentlemen," she said coldly.

"I am never alone with gentlemen by my own fault!" the girl exclaimed with a sudden passion that dyed her face crimson. "You will all lie about me, as you lied about my mother! I will not stay here any longer. I will ask the Signora Chiara to take me."

A burst of wild sobs put a stop to her speech.

The countess was astonished, no less at the flash of truth through the girl's words, than at her violence and daring. "Who says that your mother was ever slandered?" she asked.

Beatrice remained silent, terrified at what she had been surprised into saying.

"Who has told you such a thing?" persisted the countess.

Beatrice wiped her eyes, and shut her lips close.

"Will you answer me, Beatrice?" said the countess.

The girl looked her firmly in the face. "The Signora Nanna said that I was a *civetta*, just like my mother," she answered. "And I hate her for it!"

The recollection of this speech of Francesco's wife was fortunate. It allayed the suspicions she had aroused.

"The Signora Nanna is a very coarse, rude woman," said the old countess. "I am sorry she should have

spoken so of your mother. It was wrong. And now let us not think of it any more."

Beatrice drew a long breath. She had had an escape.

But Don Leonardo, who had listened, went out with a troubled face.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOME.

"WELCOME home, Mary!" said the doctor, and paused on the threshold to kiss his bride.

She threw herself into his arms for one brief, silent embrace; then they went into the house.

It was an unusual interior for a log-house to show. The doctor, assisted by the Misses Haslem, had spent the week preceding his marriage in fitting up the rooms; and they had made a nest which might have pleased a bride more accustomed to luxuries than Mary Shepherd was. Bright cretonne, plenty of books and engravings, and many little elegances of civilized life found themselves in harmonious company with the cedar boughs, the May-flowers, and the mosses contributed by this savage neighborhood.

Then there was a Timothy and a Nancy, jewels of their kind. Timothy had but just "come over," and had a wife and child at home whom the doctor was going to send for; but Nancy was an unadulterated product of Four Corners, a long, lank, childless widow of forty, who shone with cleanliness, good-nature, and enthusiasm for her employers.

Mr. Haslem's carriage and span had brought the newly married pair and a good deal of baggage up from Shepherdsville; and Nathan Perry, a younger brother of the stage-driver, was somewhere on the road with their trunks and larger possessions all piled

into a wagon from which the seat had been taken out to make room.

Mary began at once to set her things in order. Then they went to view the kitchen; and the bridegroom had reason to conclude that even for a travelled man the tour of a kitchen was not without interest. "After all," he thought, "the kitchen is the stomach of the house."

"I will come in a minute," said Mary, when this survey was ended. "I want to talk a little treason with Nancy."

When the two women were alone, the bride laid her hand on her servant's shoulder. "Oh! Nancy," she said with tremulous earnestness, "let us be good to each other, and live in peace." And Nancy, carried away by her affectionate enthusiasm, kissed the bride on her fair cheek, and half said, half sobbed: "I dunno who could help bein' good to you, you dear creater!"

This treasonable interview accomplished, the lady rejoined her husband.

"Now let us make a royal progress through our kingdom," she said.

They visited two boiling-springs, one of which issued from a cleft rock, while the other overflowed a barrel sunk in the black mould of an alder grove. Then they went to the cedar-ledge, and walked through its moss-carpeted chambers, where one might almost expect to see fairies disappearing at sound of a step. There were openings between the trees for doors; but you could push aside the flaky, fragrant branches, and pass through the newly budded walls; and sometimes, in what seemed a solid grove, you would come across an enchanting little *boudoir* no larger than a coach-body. In fact, Miss Elizabeth

Martin had named one of these "Cinderella's coach," and had told her nephew in that far-away summer that, some day, fairy horses would appear, and the coach would rise on large golden wheels and roll away.

Where the ledge dropped toward the road, Mary found a tiny oak-tree, five pallid leaves set on a drooping stem. It had exhausted the small handful of soil in its little hollow of the rock, and was dying. Full of sympathy for this minute tragedy of nature, the bride brought leaf-loads of earth to pile around its stem, and water to refresh it, and made a hedge of twigs and stones to keep it from any unwary step.

"It shall be called 'the bride's oak,'" her husband said.

Then through the trees they saw Nathan Perry with his wagonful of trunks.

Nathan was bent over with his back a half-moon curve, and his elbows on his knees. Now and then he swung his whip over the horse's back, an attention which the animal answered with a counter-switch of his long, leisurely tail. But, just before turning the last curve between him and the house, the young man, scarcely more than a hobbledehoy, stopped his willing steed, laid down the reins, and proceeded to "spruce himself up" with a comb and a little broom. Having pulled down his waistcoat, and arranged a soap-lock before each ear, Nathan then began to practise his deportment on the model of Mr. Haslem.

"He is trying to bow like Mr. Haslem!" Mary whispered in high glee. "Look at that flourish, James!" Then, smitten with remorse, she drew her husband away from their post of observation. "We wouldn't like it ourselves," she said. "It is mean to watch a person who believes himself to be alone."

They went in to receive their possessions.

"Now, these two trunks are to be kept for some future occasion," the doctor said, singling them out from the pile which littered the kitchen floor. "They will do for a rainy day."

They were his foreign trunks, and contained all his *souvenirs* of travel. He pointed out the fragments of many-colored placards on them. "I wouldn't have them torn off," he said. "I remember what delight I had, as a boy, in looking at the old placards pasted on my father's trunks. To see the 'Paris,' and know that it had actually been pasted on in Paris, was a wonderful experience. That 'gos' is what is left of Burgos, and this 'B' is the beginning of Brindisi. Here is 'Aleppo' in full beside 'Cairo.' This 'Dam' is the somewhat profane remains of Damascus."

"Oh! have you got something from Damascus?" Mary asked eagerly. "How I should like to see that city!"

"I have got a dagger, just for the name of it: and I have got some flower-seeds and seeds of fruits, for solid profit. You would like to see Damascus as I saw it one morning in March from the mountain above. I had driven out of it disgusted with its dogs, and dirt and evil odors. But when I looked back, there it lay, a large island of pale brown, its slender minarets and tiled roofs glittering in the sun, and all around it a pale rose-colored sea of almond and apricot blossoms. It was distance that brought out the beauty, and hid the deformity of it. How wise mankind will be, dear, when it can see the beauty and excellence near at hand!"

He looked at his bride seriously, even anxiously. He was secretly terrified at having brought her to

that lonely place. What if, after a while, she should be discontented, and feel herself thrown away there! His mother had given him one final stab only that morning before they left Shepherdsville.

"How can you have the heart to bury so much beauty in the woods?" she had said, looking at Mary in her bridal dress.

"We must hurry and make Beechlands a place to sing songs about!" he said more lightly, having received a glance which assured him that his bride appreciated at least one excellence near at hand. "It is more beautiful here than many a place that is sung about. Do you know 'Guadalquivir, gentle river'? I went down one April morning early, humming that song, to sentimentalize on the banks of the wondrous stream. Guess what I found!"

"Water," said Mary confidently.

"That is just the article that I did *not* find. There were the windings, the rocks, the sands, the mud, and some little shining threads wandering about 'like one who treads alone some banquet hall deserted.' The river was 'not at home.' It was at work in the kitchen. In other words, it was off to the fields in hundreds of tiny canals, making things grow. That's the way they do in Spain. Their brooks and rivers are not allowed to lounge off to the sea the whole year with their hands in their pockets. And that's the way we must do with our brooks here. We have got no water to spare. It's the one weak point of the place."

"We can make canals of the upper spring," Mary said eagerly. "It never runs dry. In the dryest weather it is always overflowing, and it spoils the lands all about it. Come and see! We can have a ceaseless little river running from it wherever water is needed."

"That's my help-mate!" exclaimed the doctor, delighted; and a weight rolled off his heart. If she would take their life so, they might escape present danger and insure future success.

The Sunday following they "appeared out," an important occasion for Four Corners.

That day there were no loiterers. The whole Heath family started from home at seven o'clock in the morning, the boys carrying a luncheon which would be eaten under a tree on the meeting-house green between morning and afternoon service. Mrs. Brown had got a new bonnet in which to do honor to the occasion, a fine leghorn with gray feathers, and a rather unbecoming yellow satin lining; and Mrs. Perry came out, for a wonder, leaving no one at home but "grandma'am" and the baby.

Overtaking the coachless Mrs. Brown on the road, for which her bonnet was far too splendid, Mrs. Perry insisted on giving her a place in the stage, to the bitter trouble of Billy Perry, who had to descend and walk the rest of the way. He got down without a murmur — children were afraid of their elders in those days — but as soon as the wagon started again, he slipped behind, caught hold of the backboard, and clinging to it, ran all the way to the Corners enveloped in a thick cloud of dust. Of course he stubbed his toes against unseen stones, and set his well-blacked shoes into unseemly uncleanness; of course his blue homespun jacket and trousers became gray, his collar would be smirched, and the rim of his straw hat an inch of dust; in a word, he would present himself to the shining congregation as dusty as a miller's sack. Moreover, he might confidently expect that his father would give him a solemn horse-whipping the next morning for this breach of decorum;

but he had vindicated his connection with the stage.

In fact, Billy was a sight to behold as he let go the backboard of the wagon, and stood panting on the meeting-house green before the eyes of the gathering congregation and his horrified family. Mrs. Brown was so concerned at having been the indirect cause of his disgraceful appearance that she wiped off his face with her own pocket-handkerchief before his mother could interfere. Then Isaac took him to the horse-shed and dusted him with a heavy hand, bestowing a supplementary cuff on each ear, and sent him whimpering into the meeting-house.

Nearly all the men of the congregation were standing in groups about the green, and some of the women had managed to arrive opportunely; when, just as the bell began to toll, the chaise of the Martins drove up, and Mary was handed down by her husband, as beautiful a bride as was ever seen, with a white crêpe shawl over her blue muslin dress, and a wreath of tremulous orange-buds on her straw bonnet.

The Haslem sisters, two pretty girls as dark as their father, sang a duet practised especially for the occasion; and the Rev. Mr. Wilder preached from the text: "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder."

Then there was a wedding reception on the green, a pleasant noon dinner with the Haslems, and a rehearsal of patriotic music in preparation for the Fourth of July.

In this celebration the newly married couple were to be the star performers, Mary as *prima donna* and her husband as orator.

"I can talk," the doctor said, after having listened to a great deal of urging. "I am not afraid to talk;

but an oration is not in my line. That, as I understand it, should be something smooth, ceremonious, and sublime. I couldn't do it if I tried."

"Perhaps it might be well to treat the subject in a more familiar and practical way," the minister said. "I think that our people may learn a lesson from a man who has seen other countries without being either unjust to them or seduced by them."

"If you want me to talk to you in the only way I can, I will do it," the doctor said, with an anxious frown. "But I still advise you to ask some one else."

This was, of course, consent.

It had not yet become the fashion with Americans to despise Fourth of July celebrations. They still believed in themselves; and at Four Corners, as well as everywhere else, the nation's birthday was the day of all days in the year. The militia appeared with fife and drum, and marched to the meeting-house to hear the oration. A small brass field-piece was discharged thirteen times, at morning, noon, and sunset; and india-crackers never ceased spluttering for twenty-four hours. The white-washed walls of the meeting-house were adorned with patriotic mottoes and portraits of Washington, Franklin, and Lafayette, all framed in cedar and roses. Flowers and evergreens festooned the pulpit and the gallery, and all the air was redolent of roses and gunpowder. New toilets made their appearance; Mary Martin coming all in white, like a swan. Everybody was full of a pleasant excitement and conscious of the exaltation of a lofty remembrance. At ten o'clock the meeting-house was crowded in every part, to the window-ledges, the spare seats in the singers' gallery, the aisles, doorways, and pulpit-stairs.

"I was a fool to consent!" thought the doctor, looking about. "But I am in for it!"

That the majority of his hearers were not cultivated people did not help him. If they lacked polish, they did not lack the metal; and they were not ignorant of their own history. Besides, they were sure to be critical, and expect impossibilities. The woman who cannot cut out a rag-baby expects every sculptor to be a Phidias.

Mr. Haslem read the Declaration of Independence in a very oratorical manner; Mr. Wilder conducted the religious part of the services; and the doctor rose in his turn.

Mary, from the midst of the choir, beamed upon him. She had sung magnificently, and was elated.

"Do you see that husband of mine?" she asked herself gleefully, as he paused for one moment, looking somewhat pale, but a very noble figure of a man.

If his audience expected that Doctor Martin was going to cover them with the glorious mantle of their forefathers that day, they were doomed to disappointment. He held this shining vesture up one moment for their admiration, then hung it away out of their reach. It was not they who had made the nation. Possibly, if its fate had depended upon them, the result might have been different. There was no glory so fallacious as that of a people which expected to be honored for no other reason than that its founders were worthy of admiration. They were to look to themselves for merit. The worth of a man was in his will; his whole future, natural and supernatural, was in his will. And what was virtue but a will that walks upright, like a man? And what was vice but a will that goes on all-fours, like a beast, or prone, like a serpent?

They were not to look forward to riches and ease as the highest good of a man or a nation. Hardships were good. The point of ripeness was the point of decay. A man who had political freedom and a peaceful home ought to consider his lot a blessed one, though he might have to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. Difficulties show the strength. When you want to wake up what of soul a man may possess, don't knock with gloved knuckles: bring down the bronze! Christ did that; and wherever there was anything of high or heroic in humanity, it rang back like a bell! Their minister would tell them this, giving supernatural reasons; he would give only the natural motive.

He wanted them not to look to any other nation, past or present, for a model, but to themselves, and nothing else, and themselves at their best. There was nothing Cæsarean about them, unless it was their political birth; and their civilization was not Grecian, nor German, nor scarcely English. He begged them not to imitate that element in American society which, like a baby brought up on a bottle, went forever blindly nosing and sucking about the world in search of a past. Minerva had no natural parentage; she sprang armed from the brain of Jove; and Minerva was wisdom. Adam and Eve had no ancestry and no past; but they had a tremendous future, and are the very types of progress and growth. The anchor is not built upon a rock; it is supported from above, and it grasps the unseen. And the anchor is hope. They needed both hope and wisdom for their future; for it was harder to retain than to win.

"When strangers come to your gates and ask for admittance," he said, "recollect the answer of Christ to the Syro-Phœnician woman: 'Let the children

first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it unto the dogs.' He said 'the children *first*,' not first and last. Be pitiful to the exiled stranger who comes to you asking for a home; but when he takes the children's bread, turn him out, and with him the unnatural child who has helped him to rob a brother.

"Beware of too much trustfulness. If we fall, it will not be by force, but by guile."

So far, though not too much flattered, the doctor's hearers had listened with complacency. But he gave them a grain of salt before he ended. Conceding and insisting on equality before the law, and the possibility open to every man and woman to attain saintliness, he went on to describe such an aristocracy of Nature's making, that some of his hearers might well have preferred a mediæval arrogance which was not impregnable to fire and sword, to this inviolable superiority to whose charter jealousy was but another signature, hate a confirmation strong as holy writ, and violence an aureole.

The doctor had not hoped to be either brilliant or original, but merely to impress some old truths on his hearers' minds. He knew well that persistent reiteration is the strongest of arguments.

"You have made me quite ashamed of having a respectable father and mother, doctor," Miss Clare Haslem said as they sauntered home, a gay and happy company, to dine together at a primitively early hour. "Papa, confess now that I was left at your door in a basket one dark night."

"How did you find it out!" exclaimed her father.

The Haslems were a cultivated family, and lived with some elegance. A failure in business in a distant city had obliged them to retire to the country for

a while, and they eagerly sought the society of Doctor Martin and his wife.

"I should like them very much if they did not turn everything to a laugh," Mary said, as she and her husband drove home that night. "They are bright and kind; but till I knew you, James, they often made me feel that to be in earnest was to be ridiculous."

"Some people think that witty," her husband said. "It isn't that they are incapable of being serious; but their whole capacity for thought is directed to raising a laugh. Of course, it isn't pleasant."

"It is more than unpleasant," his wife persisted. "They are looked to here as an example of good style; and they are teaching the young men to mock at everything."

"So you think that two thoughtless girls can ruin the tone of the place?"

"Yes, I do!" Mary answered positively. "It's of no use for you to deny our influence, James. You men are the consonants of the race, but we are the vowels. You can't even pronounce yourselves without us."

"Bless you, Molly!" said her husband. "We don't want to pronounce ourselves without you."

CHAPTER XIX.

"PEEP, PEEP, PEEP, SWEET."

On a corner table in the sitting-room at Beechlands, lying in solitary state, was a large family Bible given to Mrs. Martin as a wedding present by her mother.

A year after his first and last patriotic oration Doctor Martin opened this Bible at a blank leaf between the two Testaments, headed "Born," and wrote:

"Atalanta Elizabeth, July 4th, 1846."

He considered it the most tremendous document he had ever written.

The entries which in time followed were only second to this in importance.

"James ———, December 31st, 1847.

"Richard ———, June 15, 1849.

"Francis ———, January 3d, 1851.

"Charles ———, August 1st, 1852.

"William and Mary ———, January 1st, 1854.

"Catherine ———, June 30th, 1856.

"Robert ———, June 5th, 1858."

When this last entry was made, the doctor was forty-five years of age, and his wife ten years younger. They had been married thirteen years.

The years had been busy, prosperous, and happy. Their experiment had been a success. They still lived in the log house; but so many additions had been made to the original structure that it was no longer recognizable. They had added, as the bees do, one room at a time according to their need, and the

result was disorderly, convenient, and charmingly picturesque.

In contrast with the brown rusticity of their personal habitation, were two structures built with a view to their future state of finances and living. These were an immense barn and a glass house worthy of a palace garden. Their own house was to be built last, and the time was almost come to begin upon that. It must be a large house, they decided, built of brick and oak, to last the lives of their great-great-grandchildren.

The oaken timbers were seasoning now under cover, chosen oak-trees from their own forest. Stones had been brought and left in heaps for the weather to try before they should be used to wall the cellars. There were cedar-trees growing to line boxes and wardrobes with, and bird's-eye maple maturing for finishing woodwork. Everything was to be the best of its kind, and there was to be no shiftless hurry. The work should proceed deliberately and solidly. They were in no haste to have it done, for they had learned the satisfying delight of slow and sure progress.

The woods still surrounded them; but wedges of wheat, and corn, and clover had been driven into it on every side. No forest monarch had as yet come down for firewood, and only so much for timber as covered the land wanted immediately for some other growth; and single trees of rare beauty were spared even on the planting ground. "Trees worthy of having each a Christian name," the doctor said.

The town had scarcely changed in appearance, and the people seemed only to have grown older. They scarcely knew themselves that they had changed, so careful and so gradual had been their cultivation.

At Four Corners the old minister had died and a

young one had taken his place and married Clare Haslem, stopping her trivial laughter. This gentleman found time to give something of a superior education to a few of the more ambitious boys in the townships, among them Silvio Heath, now a serious youth of eighteen years.

Mr. Haslem, having cut all the trees down for a square mile about his habitation, and sold them for boards or firewood, had found himself able to return to city life, leaving a waste of stumps behind him.

Mr. Brown, or more properly Mrs. Brown, had built an ambitious two-storied house, painted it white, and put green blinds on it. But there they had been obliged to make a pause, and their partitions were still a semi-transparent lace-work of laths, with sheets draping decently the bedrooms into a partial privacy. Eliza Ann, known as Lizerann, the little fairy whom the doctor had found on his coming clinging to her mother's skirts, was now a brilliant girl of sixteen, fully resolved to make her merits known to the world. She had spent a whole year at a boarding-school in Doctor Martin's own Southport, where she had made the acquaintance of his family and the Selwyns, and she was supposed to be a very accomplished young woman. She did not mean that 'Talanta Martin should outshine her personally, however superior her surroundings might be; and it was the great ambition of her life to marry a rich man and have everything finer than her dear, envied friend 'Talanta. It was a little triumph that they had got their frame house first; but their old pole fences were an eye-sore to her when she thought of Doctor Martin's beautiful stone walls, "miles of it," she said, and the grand arched gateway he had made in dear memory of foreign lands, where the lines seem all

to have a swelling impulse beneath to push them into curves.

Everything was, in fact, ready for the house at Beechlands, everything but the site on which it was to be built. They had examined and discussed the merits of several, but settled on nothing, till one fine October afternoon, four months after the birth of Robert, Mary's clear voice was heard ringing through the house: —

"Come, children, your father is going to choose the site!"

Immediately was heard a gathering and scampering like that heard in Hamelin when the pied piper blew his first note; and the whole flock, busy a moment before with work and lessons, poured out of the house.

It was a tribe to make a mother's heart glad, though it might cause her some weary hours.

There was Atalanta, a tall slender girl, with her mother's splendid hair, and eyes as black as eyes can be. If you wished to find fault, you might say that she was too white and colorless in the face. But the lack of color was no indication of ill-health, though she had, perhaps, run up too fast for present strength, but not for activity. She could shoot a deer in the forehead at twenty paces, go up a tree like a squirrel, and climb rocks with any of the brothers. She could walk on the narrow top of a board fence, on the tips of her toes, like a ballet-dancer, and had walked the ridge-pole of the house. She was as light as thistle-down, and carried her head with a backward toss like a deer about to fly.

James was a sober, dark-haired boy, much like what his father had been at his age. Dick, Francis, and Charles were healthy, noisy young rascals, of ages

ranging from seven to ten. William and Mary were twins — the girl a dreamy, tender child; the boy, a consequential little boaster who needed to have his self-conceit taken down occasionally. Kitty, four years old, followed in succession of age; but that was the only respect in which she ever followed, having a well-defined will and temper of her own. Robert, familiarly known as Bub, came out only in his mother's arms.

This tribe overflowed the house, and made the woods vocal. They quarrelled within reasonable bounds, and loved each other devotedly, if tacitly. They played tricks on each other, on their mother, on Nancy and her helper, Jemima, on Timothy and his wife, Norah. They made themselves sick with green apples and cucumbers, tore their clothes, daubed their shoes, studied their lessons with their father for teacher, said their prayers night and morning, told no lies, did no mean nor dishonest action, were intelligent, modest, and all that their parents could reasonably desire.

Doctor Martin led the procession, with James beside him carrying pegs, cords, and a hammer; while Kitty held his other hand, asking questions and insisting on being attended to. Atalanta followed with her three younger brothers revolving about her, hanging on her arms, pushing her, cuffed by her, turning somersaults, and, for a change, closing with each other like prize-fighters. Willie held one of her hands.

Mary brought up the rear with the baby in her arms, and little Maze holding a fold of her gown.

They first visited all the spots where the doctor had decided not to build, making a circle which brought them finally to a pleasant upward sweep of

land south of the still unspoiled cedar-ledge, and close to the "bride's oak," now a sturdy young tree.

"This is the best place, undoubtedly," Mrs. Martin said. "The land is steep in front to the road; but we can have it terraced, and the avenue can make a wide half-moon sweep."

"The drainage will be good," added the doctor, taking up the song of praise. "Everything runs away from here except the alder-spring, and that is just what we want. How do you like it, young folks?"

A chorus of approval followed, in which the baby joined. "Bub votes for it!" said his mother, kissing him fondly.

She seated herself on the ledge with the baby in her arms, and Maze nestled down beside her and began to examine the trembling gray moss and to talk to herself in whispers. When some unusually loud outcry from the boys attracted her attention, she would look up, take in the scene one moment with her soft eyes, then return to her dreaming.

The doctor studied his ground, now from one side, now from the other, James standing by him, watchful and silent.

All the woods about them were clothed in the full glory of their autumn coloring. Their house, seen from the place where they were gathered, had a solid golden background of beeches. Toward the north a billowy sea of fantastic coloring blended hazily with the hazy blue of the sky. A rubric of maples ran in gigantic hieroglyphs through the evergreens across the road; and the road itself was fringed with a rainbow. But the cedars near them were all a pure dark green; and Mary with her babe and little Maze showed like a bunch of Mayflowers against the fragrant boughs. The gray moss they sat on was

threaded with tiny scarlet vines and fairy-like clusters of exquisitely tinted leaves, and there were liliputian mines of leaf-gold just showing in the crevices of the rock.

The boys became uproarious during that pause.

"Do be quiet, boys!" their mother said. "How can your father think when you make such a noise?"

They became whist in a moment.

"The ends of the house should look north and southward," the doctor said. "My study must run backward at the south corner."

"The kitchen must be at the northern end, father," his wife said.

A chorus struck in, "Where's my chamber?" "And mine?" "And mine?" Kitty being especially peremptory. She repeated her question, stamping her foot, and still no reply. "You're a nasty old thing!" she screamed, striking a little round fist at her father's coat-tails.

He looked at her critically in one moment of awful silence, then took her into his hands and set her up into a tree. He then went on planning his house, and measuring out rooms, while James drove the pegs.

"Oh, father!" said Mary, in a deprecating undertone, looking uneasily at her terrified wight half-hidden among the boughs to which she clung.

The doctor somewhat absently took her down and seated her by her mother, where she remained silent and quelled, looking at him askance with inimical glances, while he went on explaining his plans.

In the mean time the children took possession of the house between the pegs.

"This is the kitchen," said Charles, "and mother is making preserves." He dipped his finger into a

visionary pot of sweets, put it to his mouth, and rolled his eyes up ecstatically.

"This is the drawing-room," said Atalanta, "and I am Aunt Elizabeth Elder." She seated herself on a rock, crossed her hands and feet, and assumed a polite grimace.

"This is father's study," said Francis, "and this is his rifle." He went extravagantly through the motions of raising, aiming, and firing off a rifle, whereupon Dick, with a loud groan, fell to the ground.

"This is my chamber," Dick said then, coming instantly to life; "and I'm going to bed." He stretched himself out on the greensward and began to snore.

The other two exchanged a glance of intelligence, and pounced upon him. One pinned him down and held his hands, while the other drew forth from his pocket a many-bladed knife. A fierce combat ensued.

"Oh, let 'em fight," the doctor said, as his wife set the baby down, and prepared to separate them. "It won't do 'em any harm."

The baby, set down in haste, had rolled over on his back, and become wedged in between two knolls. The mother ran to pick him up, disentangle the grasses from his flossy hair, and set him in a more secure place. The boys dissolved their knot, and stood in loud dispute over the knife, Atalanta acting as umpire.

Maze, all unmindful, or translating all into a world of her own, sat with her wide, gray eyes fixed on air, and built up a cloud-palace above the pegs. Fragments treasured from her father's talk of foreign lands mingled with fairy stories she had read to shape the airy structure, fantastic pinnacles and domes swimming in the bright air, invisible to all but her.

The doctor went to correct his plan, accompanied by his wife.

"We might have a T running across the north end," he said. "It could be long enough for three rooms: the kitchen, dining-room, and my study. The dividing walls should be double, with closets in them. A door from outside could enter the kitchen through a porch, as now. A door would open from the dining-room, here, into the drawing-room" —

"Wait a minute, dear!" said Mary, lighting up. "An L would be better than a T, which would make the kitchen too prominent. And it would be better to have the hall and stairs here, separating the L completely from the rest of the house. The drawing-room could be here, and here a little work-room. Here is our bedroom, with a little room beside it for Maze and Kitty. The rest of the children can go up-stairs." She paused for breath.

"C'mup stairs!" cried Dick, seizing his brothers. "Mother says, c'mup stairs!" and he dragged them up an imaginary stair.

The doctor, somewhat swept off his feet by his wife's sudden illumination, stood slowly taking in her plans, his eyebrows raised with a vague notion of seeing the better.

"There could be large closets here, and here," Mrs. Martin went on, with the fervor of one almost at the goal. "This could be one chimney, with a fire for kitchen and dining-room. The drawing-room chimney could be where Bub sits."

The baby, who for several seconds had been sitting still in a baby trance, came out of it when he saw all eyes fixed upon him, and, seeming to think that something was expected of him, put his hands to the ground preparatory to rising to his feet.

"Sit still, Bub!" cried Dick. "You're a chimbley. Look out, there! All your bricks are tumblin' down."

"It isn't a bad plan," the doctor admitted thoughtfully, with the unconscious crest-fallen look of one who finds the wind taken out of his sails by somebody he is teaching. "It isn't a bad plan," he repeated, rubbing his left ear.

"Mamma, where is I doin' to sleep?" asked Maze in a soft whisper against her mother's gown.

"You and Kitty shall have a little bedroom close to father and mother, heart's darling!" said Mary.

The discussion flagged, and the family sauntered back to their visible home, leaving the invisible one in a hazy, golden atmosphere, and a cornice of radiant foliage, inhabited by peaceful hopes.

"After all, we have been very happy here, James," the wife said, pausing on the threshold she had crossed as a bride, and looking at the brown logs with tearful eyes.

"And will continue to be very happy here, wife," the doctor responded, laying his hand on her shoulder. "You don't expect to move out to-night, do you?"

She was glad that she could not.

"Bless me! I must go and print the butter!" she said. "Nancy is ironing. I had forgotten. There is hardly time to finish before supper."

Little Maze, standing beside her mother, saw the humid eyes, and thought that it must be the belated butter-printing which had called up those tears. She followed to the north porch with an ache in her childish heart.

Presently Mrs. Martin, as she stood deftly patting the golden butter into shape, and printing it with a large rose, became aware of the child's presence, and

smiled round at her little figure standing in the open door against the sunset.

"Mamma, can you get done?" the child asked timidly.

"I shall try my best to finish it before the sun sets," said Mary. "But you mustn't interrupt me, dear."

Mazy went slowly out, and looked at the western sky, her soul full of trouble. The sun seemed to her but a few inches above the trees. Then she looked at the wooden butter-tray, and saw that it was still half full.

After a moment, a bright thought flashed into her clouded face. She glanced back at her mother, then ran out across the yard and hid herself behind a large rock there that seemed to have pinned down a remnant of the forest, standing yet. She had recollected the story of Joshua, and many fragments of Scriptural lore from their daily reading, only half understood. Those lessons fell upon the fluid soul of the child as seed fell upon the primeval earth, producing a colossal and fantastic growth of ideas.

Mazy looked about her to make sure that no one was in sight, then knelt down, and prayed with fervent passion: "O Lord, don't let the sun go down till mother's got her butter printed! O Lord, don't let my mother cry! For Christ's sake. Amen."

She rose, and looked eagerly at the sun. It still hung, a globe of palpitating golden fire, above the western trees. Gazing so, she thought she saw one-half of a pair of glittering cymbals, beating, beating, leaving the glittering edge of the other half visible from time to time. And, ever beating, it did not seem to sink.

Maze returned to the porch through a yard full

of large, ghostly suns imprinted on her retina by the golden one.

Mary was drawing the sleeves down over her superb white arms; and the wooden plates were full of rose-embossed pats of butter. The sun, touching the tree-tops, threw a sheaf of sparkling beams over her as she paused there, gazing at it; over her noble, matronly form, her sweet and spirited face, as dreamy for the moment as Mazy's own, and over her coiled-up hair that glistened like a crown.

She did not lower her eyes when the child entered, but held out her hand and continued to stand so gazing till the pine-tops lost their flame and the last sun-ray was withdrawn.

Then, as if awaking, "Come, mother's little girl!" she said, and led the child in.

And she never knew that Mazy had been a mighty man of valor for her that evening, unless she had read some mystic translation of the child's prayer in that momentary tranced gazing at the setting sun.

Inside the house it was nightfall, and the table was prepared for supper. They took their places, the doctor asked a blessing, the boys kicked each other amicably under the table, and Kitty fixed her eyes upon a dish not seen every day. The bright light of a hanging lamp shone pleasantly on the two rows of fresh young faces.

"I want some bolonge!" announced Kitty, while her father was saying "Amen!"

She meant blanc-mange.

"It isn't bolonge," said Dick, teasingly.

"'Tis bolonge," declared Kitty.

"No; 'tisn't bolonge!"

"'Tis bolonge, too!"

"No," said Dick, with an air of polite satisfaction,

having committed his sister to her error, "it isn't bolonge; it's cracked wheat."

An instantaneous flash of conviction passed over Kitty's round little face, immediately checked again in its betrayal. She never owned to a mistake.

"Well," she said with dignity, "I'm going to call it bolonge; and if I want to call it macchewoni, I shall call it so."

"She will make her way in society!" the doctor remarked, dryly.

"Father, if cousin Frank goes hunting, may I go with him?" asked Atalanta.

"There will not be rifles enough, daughter," her father said, gently, with a glance that showed she was the darling of his heart.

"And besides, Atalanta," added her mother, "Francis is a young man now, and you are a great girl. He might not think it proper for you to go with him."

The girl blushed slightly. She was beginning to see that her Amazonian tastes did not always meet with unqualified approval.

"You must take him to see Ann Eliza Brown," her mother went on kindly; "and we can have her up here for a day. You had better let James and Silvio be his companions in the woods."

"As you say, mother!" replied the daughter, gravely.

For a moment she remained thoughtful; then the smile came back again. It was pleasant to find herself growing a young lady.

CHAPTER XX.

LOVE AND GLORY.

Ann Eliza Brown was undeniably a beauty. She was tall, well formed, and had an extraordinarily brilliant complexion, with pretty features. Black hair and blue eyes combined to give her beauty a somewhat rare character.

She was quite aware that such beauty should not be wasted in the woods; and many were the projects she had formed to change her condition.

The chief one was to make a brilliant marriage. She had not seen gentlemen turn to look at her in the streets of Southport without becoming aware that her face might be a fortune.

A secondary ambition, which might aid in the accomplishment of the first, was to become a famous authoress. While at school her compositions had been commended; and a poem of hers had been printed in the Shepherdsville *Clarion*. To be sure, it went to fill up the advertising column; but it was printed.

The week before Mr. Francis Elder, junior, came to visit his uncle's family, Ann Eliza had come across an offer of prizes in a weekly newspaper. The editor, after lamenting that the United States had no national anthem worthy of their glory, offered three prizes to stimulate the patriotism and genius of its readers.

The smallest prize was ten dollars; but to that person who should send a poem judged by a committee of

literary gentlemen worthy of being adopted by the nation, one hundred dollars would be paid.

At that time one hundred dollars seemed a fortune to a poor country girl; and Ann Eliza began to think how she would spend it before she had fairly read the advertisement. Firstly, she would have the house plastered, and something in the drawing-room besides a hair-cloth sofa, chairs, and rocking-chair. Then she would have a new winter suit, a little present each for father, mother, and John, and a few dollars to lay aside in case somebody should invite her to go to Southport for a visit.

She sighed, thinking how unlikely it was that she should have such an invitation till she had first entertained some one of her schoolmates; and how could she ask one of those young ladies to a house with lace-work partitions and a fence, in front, of cedar poles!

Moreover, she and her mother did all of the house-work. She had told no lies in Southport; but it had not seemed to her necessary to say that she had to wash dishes, churn butter, and make bread at home.

Poor beauty! It was perhaps blameworthy; but her heart ached for Southport and the admiration of men. If only she could win that prize, the people there would hear of it, would want to see her again, would, perhaps, invite her there. She fancied herself the centre of an admiring throng listening while her anthem was being sung by a full choir and orchestra.

The first night after reading the advertisement, she bolstered herself up in bed, propped a candlestick up beside her, and studied all the poems in the precious paper. It would be a pity, indeed, if she could not write as good poetry as that, she thought.

All the next day she pored over the subject, dream-

ing of glory, while she salted the coffee, burnt the custards, and let the bread sour. At evening, while the family lingered over the supper-table, she confided her project to them. There were only three at home beside herself: her father and mother, and her brother John, otherwise known as the Imp. He was the youngest child, and only twelve years old.

"Now, John, if you ever tell anybody," she said, with a stern look at him, "I will never tell you anything again as long as I live!"

"I never tell anything!" John replied indignantly. Come to think of it, he never did tell anything. It was almost impossible to make him divulge the time of day even, so non-committal was he and conveniently ignorant of any subject concerning which he might be interrogated.

The announcement was followed by an impressive silence, broken first by Mrs. Brown.

"Do you think that you can do it, Lizerann?" she asked doubtfully.

Mrs. Brown had read the English classical poets through a dozen times, knew Thomson's "Seasons" by heart, and had parsed Pope fore and aft, and was altogether more respectful toward literature than her daughter, who knew but little, and infinitely more so than her husband, who knew nothing. With all possible faith in Ann Eliza's talent, she could not be sure of her artistic cultivation, though, of course, a whole year at a boarding-school ought to do much.

Mr. Brown had no doubts whatever. He looked upon the prize as won, and rubbed his hands with smiling satisfaction as he gazed admiringly at Lizerann. It was worth while to bestir himself, or even to be bestirred uncomfortably by a tall Roman-nosed woman, when it was question of sending a girl like

that to boarding-school or building a two-storied house for her.

Two or three days of silent incubation followed, during which the poetess carried her head rather higher than usual, was somewhat abstracted, and not worth much about the house. Her father asked her once or twice how the poem got along, but received such enigmatical answers that he was awed into silence.

The mother awaited developments, silent and anxious. She was thinking: "How cut up Lizerann will be if she should fail!"

Meantime, she required very little help from her, found no fault with any blunders she might make, and was careful not to speak to her when she seemed thoughtful, lest her voice might break some fine rising bubble of fancy. She looked at and approached the girl with a certain timidity, and tried every simple device she knew and could to foster her imagination. One morning, when her daughter came out late to breakfast, there was a beautiful rose in her plate, the prettiest from the rose-tree in the window; and one afternoon, as the girl sat dreaming at her bedroom window, her mother stole in with a cup of coffee and a slice of cake, set them down, smiled, and went out again without a word.

"Thank you, mother!" the daughter called out after her, smitten with a sudden pang of self-reproach and gratitude. "How bad poor mother will feel if I should fail!" she added.

John had no sentiment about the matter.

"When you get your prize-money, Lizerann," he said, "I want you to give me a new sled shod with iron."

"Have you any other orders to give?" his sister inquired loftily.

Mrs. Brown, behind her daughter's back, was making a fierce pantomime at the boy, with face and hand.

"Let Lizerann alone!" she said when she got a chance to speak apart to him. "Don't say poem to her again!"

Little by little the poetess lost her reserve; and one evening she brought out a handful of loose sheets of paper, and called a family council after supper. She had found unexpected difficulties in writing a national anthem.

The dishes had been washed, the floor swept, and there were two candles burning on the kitchen table. Mrs. Brown knit a stocking with her feet toward the fire, and Mr. Brown and John lolled on the table, having been hard at work all day.

Ann Eliza seated herself with a superior air, sorted her papers, and remarked that she had only made a little beginning. Mr. Brown and John settled themselves still more firmly on their elbows, and prepared to listen. Mrs. Brown suspended her knitting, sat very upright, and bent her head to look over her round-bowed spectacles at her daughter.

"There are some lines that I cannot finish," said Ann Eliza. "I get everything but the last word. I need a rhyming dictionary. We had one at school."

There was a breathless silence.

"Ahem!" said the poetess, and read:

> Columbia, let the nations rise,
> And laud thy glories to the skies —

"I don't know whether I shall begin so," she said, interrupting herself, "or in this other way," searching among her papers.

"Get right up, nations!" said John with great

urbanity. "You may laud us as much as you have a mind to."

No one took any notice of this triviality.

"Europe, 'n' Asia, 'n' Africa, don't be afraid of us!" said John. "Stand up on your hind legs and laud right out."

"Will you be still, John!" his mother said sharply.

"John, shut up!" said his father.

Ann Eliza read:

> All hail, Columbia mine!
> May freedom still be thine,
> When the young trophies of thy glory
> Shall have grown old and hoary
> As some vine-mantled tower
> That rears its broken battlements,
> With wild-flowers in the weedy rents
> Where once the cannon spoke with power,
> And ——

"Now," said the poetess, breaking off, "I want another line to rhyme with 'mine' and 'thine' of the first two lines. If I had the right word I could fit the idea to it."

"That's very pretty," said Mrs. Brown, with a faint, doubtful smile.

Mr. Brown became intensely studious. John grasped his forehead with both hands, and seemed to be wrestling with his brain.

"We might find the right word by looking in the spelling-book," Mr. Brown said presently. "John, where's your Webster's Spelling-book?"

"But it's the end of a word that makes the rhyme," said Ann Eliza, "and they don't print them backwards. You will have to read the book through to find anything."

"You just let me see!" her father replied confi-

dently. "If once I get hold of the fore-end of a word, the hind-end has got to come."

The spelling-book was brought, and Mr. Brown set himself to studying the long columns of words.

John dropped into his chair again, opened his mouth and went off like a battery.

"Fine, line, shine, brine, twine, pine, kine, whine!"

Mr. Brown looked up from under his eyebrows at his son, without raising his head, and gave him what might be called a piece of a smile, his mind being divided; that is, the corner of his mouth next to the boy was drawn up into a slightly smiling position, while the other corner remained perfectly serious. He stared dreamily a little while in that way, the corner of his mouth still drawn up, but the smile extinguished. Then he glanced at his daughter to see if she would avail herself of the rich material poured out before her.

She was still bending her white brow and crimson cheeks over her manuscript.

Mr. Brown returned to his study of the spelling-book.

John went off again with explosive rapidity: "Divine, incline, combine, refine, opine, wine, swine!"

"John," said his mother, with dignity, "enough is as good as a feast!"

She might as well have addressed herself to a barrel of Chinese crackers on the Fourth of July.

"Decline," said John, "condign, malign, quinine, feline, rapine, recline, dine, vine, nine!"

His sister looked up at last.

"We shall have to put you out with a pail of cold water," she said.

"Countersign," said John, who seemed unable to stop himself, "discipline, anodyne, tine" —

"John, I tell you to stop!" his sister burst forth; and, both father and mother turning upon him at the word, his guns were finally silenced with a sharp countershot of "Johns!"

A silence followed, Mr. Brown poring over the spelling-book, and Ann Eliza studying her various beginnings. After a while, John, recovering from his discomfiture, began to talk in a low tone to his mother.

"The doctor's folks have got company," he said. "There's a feller come to-day. The doctor went down to the Corners to meet him. They went past in the chaise while you and Lizerann were down cellar."

"Did you see who he was?" the mother asked, with great interest, ceasing to knit.

"Yes; he was a fellow with gloves on, and shiny boots, and a tall hat."

"Did you see his face?" Mrs. Brown had laid down her knitting, and turned quite round. The advent of a stranger was important; and everybody was interested in the affairs of the Martins.

"Yes," John said; "he was white, like a girl, and had little yeller mustachios."

The two, whispering together that their colloquy might not disturb the muse at her studies, did not perceive that she studied no longer. Her hand still supported her head, and her face was still inclined over the paper, but her brilliant blue eyes, sparkling with excitement, were fixed upon her brother. Suddenly she rose and folded her papers. "I'm going to bed!" she said; and, with a brief good-night, disappeared.

"Poor Lizerann!" sighed her mother, with a troubled face; "I hope she isn't going to sit up. It is of

no use. She won't find it so easy to write a better song than 'Hail, Columbia!'"

She was so anxious that, after going to bed, she got up again to look through the door of her chamber and see if her daughter's light was out. She saw the sheets that veiled that maiden's bower still aglow, and heard a movement in the chamber.

"Lizerann," she said, softly, "I wouldn't sit up any longer, if I were you. You'll make yourself sick."

The answer came from the direction of the dressing-glass. "I'm going to bed in a minute, mother."

Judging by the sound of her voice, the girl did not seem to be much cast down, the mother thought, but, on the contrary, very cheerful and wide-awake. She went back to her own bed, comforted.

Ann Eliza was very far from being cast down. She was full of excitement. Seated before her glass, she was trying the effect of different styles of hair-dressing. Now she drew her shining black locks up from the brow and temples, and lifted her head with the lofty air befitting such a style; and now she shook the ebon masses low, and, bending her white neck, looked out with starry eyes from underneath their shadow.

The door of a little sheet-iron air-tight stove in the room stood open; and one might have seen within a large roll of twisted-up papers. They were the fragments of her unfinished national hymn. She had renounced it as completely as if it had never been. She already scorned the thought that such eyes and cheeks as hers should lose their freshness over pen and ink and paper.

"I saw him staring at me once in church," she thought.

CHAPTER XXI.

CINDERELLA AND THE PRINCE.

John Brown's description of Mr. Francis Elder was a sufficiently correct one. He was delicate of face and figure, and liked to dress himself well. He resembled his father as glass resembles crystal. He was a young man after his grandmother's heart. She would have been happy if Doctor James, her son, had taken such a shape. He was quiet of manner, showed a smiling sense of superiority over the great ungloved, and cherished an invincible longing and ambition to enter upon a diplomatic career. His family were doing their utmost in this direction; but a secretaryship was hard to get. There was hope, however, that, the spring following, he might be accepted as vice-consul at some European port.

"I thought that I must see something of my own country before leaving it," he said to his uncle.

There was a great rejoicing in the house of Martin over their visitor. They were a cordial, hospitable family, even to strangers; and relatives, to their minds, had rights in the house superior to their own.

Mary marshalled all her young ones, and had no reason to be ashamed of their manners nor of the blushes with which they greeted their city cousin. Those roses in their fresh young faces were the only sign of rusticity; and a very pretty sign it was.

Atalanta had spent a month with her Aunt Elizabeth's family in Southport the winter before, and had

been considered a very well-behaved girl; but Francis had never seen the others. He found them better bred than his brothers and sisters.

He was himself polite enough to try to enter into their interests. He picked his way about the barn, found the cows and hens "very nice," went to see where the house was to be built, was enthusiastic about the site, and walked up the road to see the deer, which faded away before him. He ventured into a wood-path to see the track a bear had left there only the day before, and, after examining it with trepidation, got back to the highway as soon as he could without running.

Bears were no longer every-day visitors at Beechlands; and immediately on discovering this track a company of neighbors had started out and scoured the woods for half a day in search of the animal, but without success. Everybody was talking about that bear, lamenting its escape, and hoping for its return.

The only subject which really interested Francis Elder was Europe, and as he talked on this subject with his uncle, some slight air of patronage and condescension he had shown unintentionally melted away from him. The doctor's familiarity with foreign languages, and the composure and discrimination with which he spoke of European peoples and customs, made an impression on the young man, who had been brought up in that strange American school where a superstitious hatred and suspicion of foreign things existed and exists side by side with an equally superstitious bowing down to the same. Mr. Francis Elder was not alone in maintaining with a superficial sincerity that his own country was superior to anything foreign, while not only ready but in haste to be ashamed of it.

The morning after his arrival he went down to call on Miss Ann Eliza Brown, being the bearer of many compliments to her. Besides, he remembered her as pretty. He went with a complacent face, and returned with a very thoughtful one. He had gone to see a pretty country girl, and had been met by a goddess — an affable one, to be sure, but one who seemed to condescend in talking with him.

How beautiful she was!

When he reached the gate at Beechlands, he had not yet done thinking of her; and since no one was in sight, he strolled onward past the house where Timothy lived, and into the forest-shaded road beyond. How beautiful she was! He had never seen such a complexion. His mother and sisters thought that to look refined one should have a white, lily-like face; but he would like to see the woman who would not be glad to have two such pink cheeks, if she could get them.

Walking with a soundless step the smooth road, the young man presently heard a low murmuring that might be a brook's voice, or might be a human voice, and, looking about, perceived his cousin Atalanta seated on a high rock at the road-side, with a book in her hand. She was facing the woods, and her small double-barrelled rifle was beside her.

Mrs. Martin wanted some venison; and both the doctor and James were at Four Corners, while Timothy had work to do. Atalanta was the Diana of the household; and, while waiting for a deer to come out, was studying her Spanish lesson.

She was conjugating verbs, her eyes fixed on the deep shadows before her, only leaving them long enough to snatch a new word from the page. A pine-tree overshadowed the mossy rock where she sat, its

branches hanging low and half concealing her figure, which was still further concealed by the colors she wore. A dark green tunic over a brown petticoat made her seem a part of the forest where she sat motionless. This was her hunting costume.

She wore moccasons, bought of the Indians who came to Shepherdsville every summer, and set up an encampment near some grove where they could get basket-wood.

So dressed, and sitting motionless, she could find out all the secrets of the forest; only if a sunbeam should drop through on to her hair, or her lily of a face, she might startle the wild creatures passing by.

Hearing a step, she turned quickly with a frown and an uplifted finger. At sight of her cousin, the frown changed to a smile, but the finger remained uplifted. She laid her book down as he paused, and signed him that she had heard a sound in the woods. Then looking eagerly there, her head bent forward, she slipped her hand along the moss to reach her rifle.

For a moment her cousin forgot the enchantress he had left, in looking at her. At her change of position a sunbeam had flashed down, crinkling like lightning along the braids of dusky gold that hung down her back. But it was her movements, even more than her strange beauty, that excited his admiring wonder. He knew something of athletic exercises, and he said to himself that he had never seen anything that approached the strength and grace of that slow hand that reached and raised the rifle without crackling a leaf or a twig, and that slow rising from a sitting posture to one knee. She did not float up softly, though her smooth motion made no sound nor jerk; he saw the light strain of the lifting shoulders which seemed to raise the body, and guessed at the lifted foot and

fine steely muscles of the leg. He could see the glistening of her eyes and the breathless parting of her lips as she bent forward and gazed eagerly into the forest.

And then, as he looked, a tremor went over her, and a deep blush of excitement dyed her face and neck for a moment and left her cheeks crimson. The rock concealed from him what she saw. He could read the story only in her face and movements. Was she so excited about a deer, when they could see a score any day? It must be a fine antlered stag, at least.

Up came the rifle with a fine swing in the two strong young hands, and a sharp report rang through the forest.

Amid the echoes that followed was heard a gurgling growl. Then, with another rush of echoes, she fired the second barrel, and, dropping the rifle to her feet, started erect, clung to the nearest branch, leaned forward, half off the rock in her eagerness, and gazed into the forest.

There was a moment of silence. Atalanta, gazing intently, slid along the branch, walking over it with her hands till she rested only one foot on the rock. Then there came a triumphant cry: "Oh, cousin Francis! I have killed the bear! I have killed the bear!"

Her face flashed round at him for one brief glance; then she swung herself off the rock and dashed into the woods.

Francis Elder was a man of peace, and preferred to have nothing to do with firearms, and to see wild beasts through the safe bars of a cage. But some slight contagion of her excitement aided his sense of duty in following his cousin. A tiny path entered the

woods before him. He followed it, and found her bending over a prone black mass that lay motionless at her feet.

"I have killed the bear they all were searching for!" she cried out, turning her glowing face toward him. "I wondered that the step should be so soft. He came by the swamp there, and his foot is like a hand: see!" She turned up the great paw, to her cousin's terror. "I looked, and, instead of a gray head high up, there was something black low down! A cedar-tree almost hid him. Then he looked round the trunk, and looked at me! Tra, la, la!" Up went her arms over her head, as if they held a tambourine or cymbals. "Tra, la, la! I must go and tell them!"

She was off, skipping from stone to stone, and out of sight when he had reached the road. Her cousin hastened after her, feeling somewhat injured. Atalanta should have remembered, he thought, that he was new to these wild scenes, and might not like to be left alone even with a dead bear. A bear has relations and a family as well as a man; and how could he know but that this animal's dear ones might be on his trail, have heard the fatal shots, and be rushing to avenge him! It was an unpleasant position for a nice young man with well-polished shoes and tightly fitting gloves, and he hastened to extract himself from it.

In a few minutes he met the family. They were all there except his aunt, Mazy, and the baby. Atalanta had met her father and James at the gate, and a cry had brought the others, not excepting Timothy and Norah. All were in great excitement. Atalanta was dancing at her father's side, and he looking at her with a proud, fond smile. The young David was

not more triumphant over Goliath than Atalanta over the bear she had shot.

Timothy, bearing a hunting-knife and rope, grinned and gazed at the young huntress; Nancy, solemn and resolute, had a carver in her hand, nobody knew why.

At a little distance behind the others, Kitty and Willie were doing their best to keep up with their pace, alternately walking and running on their short little legs. Kitty's mouth was sealed, and she looked straight ahead, and winked with the intensity of her determination to reach the scene of action as soon as possible. Willie was smiling and swelling with complacency.

"Oi mean to kill a bear some time!" he announced pompously. "Oi ain't afraid of bears! I can walk right up to 'em!"

"He hasn't revived and crawled away?" Atalanta called out at sight of her cousin.

"Oh! he will wait for you!" he replied.

It was only after an effervescence of several hours over this event that Francis Elder found an opportunity to speak to his cousin of Ann Eliza Brown.

Atalanta praised her generously, especially for her cheeks. Those crimson roses seemed to her a crowning gift, her own face being so colorless. When the subject of her beauty was exhausted, however, she found no more to say.

"She is a good girl; oh, yes!" she said, and looked a little surprised even that no word of more definite praise presented itself.

"We have a rose-bush that has roses just the color of her cheeks," she added. "Come to the greenhouse and I will show you. We keep it here."

She showed him a rich pink rose heavy with per-

fume. "There! Once I tried one against her face, and you couldn't have seen a shade of difference."

"I suppose aunt Mary doesn't allow them to be broken," he said.

"Oh! I will give you one now, if you like. Of course she allows it!"

He arrested her hand. "Not now!" he said, blushing slightly. "If I may have one, I will take it some other time."

"Ann Eliza is coming up to spend the day to-morrow," Atalanta said. "Father took her down a note from mother this afternoon. And she will be at the debating-club this evening. But I suppose you will not go there?"

"Why should I not?" Francis asked quickly.

Atalanta looked doubtful. "It would scarcely interest you, I am afraid; and perhaps some of the young men might be embarrassed to find you there — especially Silvio."

"Who is Silvio?" her cousin asked.

"Silvio Heath, a neighbor of ours. Father began to teach him with James; and then they were both sent down to Mr. Loring, the minister at the Corners. Mr. Loring is to fit them for college. James will go to college, but I do not know whether Silvio will or not. He is one of the slow and sure sort. He is going to speak to-night for the first time. He is one of the disputants."

"What is the question?" the young man asked with a smile. He was highly amused at the idea of hearing the first speech of a young rustic.

Atalanta looked at him earnestly. She hardly liked his smile. "Father gave them the old question, 'Which is the greater man, Washington or Colum-

bus ?' He says it will make them study two important eras in history."

The young man did not find Silvio Heath interesting, and returned to Miss Brown. "I suppose she is engaged to somebody here," he said, with a careless switch of his slender cane.

"Oh, no!" said Atalanta; "she scorns the young men about here. She says that she means to marry a rich old man, if she can find one."

Mr. Francis Elder's face expressed stern disapprobation. "I think very little of a young lady who would marry for money," he said.

"Oh, perhaps she didn't quite mean to marry for money alone. It was only that she does not like being poor."

"I don't suppose that any one likes to be poor," he replied, somewhat mollified. "But, about the debating-club, Atalanta. I hope that you will allow me to go."

This club was one of Doctor Martin's pet foundations. It had already been twelve years in existence, and its proudest boast was that one of its principal original members had been elected to the State Legislature. This gentleman, after having served his term as a law-maker, had visited Four Corners, and spoken in one of their debates; and he had declared that whatever success he had had in his career was due to the discipline of their disputes, and what he had learned from their respected founder, Doctor James Martin.

Only one of the original members remained, and he was to oppose Silvio Heath in the present debate.

"Poor Silvio! It is hard for him to have such a *début!*" the doctor said privately to his wife. "Bond isn't two inches deep, between you and me, but he is

as smooth as oil. Silvio will be disconcerted by his opponent's readiness, though he isn't a common fellow himself. His genuine modesty stands in his way."

"No; Silvio isn't a common fellow," Mary said with emphasis. "He is a true, noble soul. He isn't brilliant, that we must own; but he is noble. I wish" — She broke off abruptly, and did not say what she wished.

"Don't let's interfere with Divine Providence, Mary," the doctor interposed somewhat hastily, his face a little anxious.

It was all very well to bring up children in a rustic neighborhood, with health, purity, simplicity, and moral courage; but as the time for marriage approached, a problem presented itself. Had he perfected these creatures only that they might deteriorate in another generation? It was like loading with jewels a fine new ship. But for what port? Must it stay and rot at the wharf? Up to this time, life had been a noble preparation; but for what? Certainly it was not that his rare Atalanta, a creature of a crystalline, splendid simplicity, should become a farmer's wife, and be above her rustic neighbors all her life, with no spur to her intellect from emulation, and no true appreciation of anything that she was or might do.

The doctor was secretly sorry that the monthly debate had not taken place before his nephew's arrival, and that Francis would not understand their hints that he had better stay at home. Go he would, and go he did.

The meeting was in the schoolhouse where Mary had once presided, and everybody came from far and near. The minister from Four Corners, Mr. Loring, came to see how his pupil would acquit himself; and

others came for the sake of a moonlight drive or walk, and because there was no other diversion. And half the audience brought their own lights: tallow candles, spermaceti candles and fluid-lamps.

Francis Elder could not but admit that the scene was a picturesque one when he came in sight of the schoolhouse. The moon, a little past the full, had not yet risen; but from afar a red glare had saluted them, painting the forests, and sending a rosy cone of light up into the dewy sky. Six pine torches, fixed on poles about the opening where the schoolhouse stood, illuminated the space. There were splashes of red, blotches of black, faces that came vividly out and disappeared again, and all in a tremor as the flames wavered.

In this strange, fitful glare Francis Elder was presented to Mr. and Mrs. Loring, and met Ann Eliza Brown again, and received from her a very haughty bow.

At a distance, half hidden beneath a tree, stood Silvio Heath, alone. His face was pale, his hands cold. How could he ever speak before all these people, and especially before that elegant young man from Southport! Every idea seemed to have fled from his mind. The doctor would be ashamed of him, and Atalanta would laugh. She was as full of laughter as a brook. She often teased and ridiculed him good-naturedly; now she would laugh with scorn.

The little pause on the green had enabled those who brought lights to put them in place. Doctor Martin had hung a Venetian lamp of the San Marco pattern over the desk, Mrs. Brown propped up securely two fluid-lamps, and Mrs. Loring set her spermaceti candles on the stove. A younger Perry

contributed a pair of long tallow candles set each in a potato cut flat at one end and hollowed out at the other. A dozen or more candles were set in sconces on the walls.

The company entered and took their places with ceremony. Francis Elder managed to seat himself by Miss Brown in one of the back seats. The soft purple merino of her dress touched him as they sat side by side; he was near enough to examine the white neck with the exquisite little curl on it; and the glowing cheek was so near that he might have smelt it if it had been a rose.

Ann Eliza laid her gloves on the desk before her, and began to unwind a fleecy white cloud that had been twisted about her head. The other ladies all remained covered; but she chose to display her shining braids. Ever since her return from boarding-school she had assumed the airs of a lady of fashion, and taken pleasure in presenting herself in public in somewhat different guise from the others.

Mr. Francis Elder had been inthralled by her in the morning; but her image suffered from the vulgarity of her present setting. The little ill-lighted schoolhouse, the potato candlesticks, the rustic company, all reflected upon her, and he was just ready to smile at his subjection of the morning and her pinchbeck grandeur, when she leaned past him to speak to Atalanta. An exquisite profile, a crimson cheek, and an ebon braid of hair were there within a foot of his breast. And besides, something in her manner of bending reminded him that she was quite as tall as he, if not taller, and seemed to intimate that she thought him a little fellow. His budding contempt withered away at these signs of contempt from her. She regained her position, taking no more

notice of him than if he had been a column separating her from her friend.

He humbly drew a beautiful crimson rose from a carefully folded cone of paper, and, bowing his head, laid it before her.

"Oh, thanks!" she said quite aloud; and, taking the rose, smelt of it, and fastened it in her hair.

There was no coquetry, no bashfulness, no concealment. She received his offering as one who took homage for granted. If she had smiled, or beamed, or blushed, he would have despised her.

"She might have said thank you! to a servant," he thought. "And her putting the rose in her hair before everybody is an act of supreme indifference."

The meeting was opened by the minister, who explained the object of their association, and gave its history.

"That's for my benefit!" thought Francis Elder, with inward amusement.

Then Silvio Heath was called. He rose, stumbling a little, and stood beside the desk where the minister and Doctor Martin sat. His face was perfectly white, and he stood a moment in a death-like silence, without speaking. At sight of all those eyes fixed upon him, his brain whirled. Lights and faces rushed together, and grew dark before him.

Then a little clapping of the hands, and a voice near by that whispered "Courage!" broke the spell. He gathered himself together, pulled his tongue from the roof of his mouth, moistened his lips, and began to say something in a strange, tremulous voice, he hardly knew what.

Silvio was now nineteen years of age, and a good-looking young man, well-grown, athletic, and serious. His mild brown eyes and tawny hair were unchanged;

but his brows had widened, and his mouth grown firm. He had improved with a constantly increasing, eager passion the advantages which his intimacy with the Martins gave him; but he was still rustic; and, as he floundered through the opening sentences of his discourse, his hands hung upon him like two stones. He seemed to pick them heavily up and lay them down again at every moment.

"Poor fellow! Why doesn't he throw them away!" whispered Ann Eliza to the gentleman beside her.

Enchanting whisper! which reached him wafted on a warm, fragrant breath.

"That is what he is trying to do," he whispered in reply.

We need not follow the course of the young orator's failure. He forgot half that he had meant to say, and said the other half badly. The sound of his own voice filled him with anguish. It echoed hollowly through the room, with a mournful, despairing cadence, better fitted to lament the death of his hero than to celebrate his virtues.

Silvio had studied his subject for months, and studied it well, and, having a fine instinctive sense of order, had arranged his material admirably. For the manner of its delivery, he had recited alone in the deep woods, with only wild beasts to listen; and in the wakeful nights closely preceding his trial he had sometimes risen and gone out into the clover-field to repeat again and again some favorite passage. At last, this very afternoon, he had gone over the whole argument in the presence of his family, gathered in solemn conclave in the kitchen at home. This dress-parade had been a success, and only with the setting sun had his courage begun to fail. A tremor had

come with the first star, but enthusiasm as well. Walking down through the solemn woods in the rear of his family, his imagination had spread its wings, and his heart swelled with desire to win distinction — for her sake! He did not hope for happiness, as other men expect it, but only to be strong, and honored, and noble, that he might strive and spend himself always for her!

Sinking, rather than sitting down, he glanced first at Atalanta with anguish in his eyes. She was looking intently at her father, and there was a slight frown on her delicate brow. Ann Eliza Brown and Francis Elder were both trying not to smile.

Then he looked at his own father. The deacon's eyes were downcast, and his face burned with a blush of mortification.

"Nobody seemed to pity or think of him!" Silvio thought bitterly.

Yes, Doctor Martin, without joining in the faint, commiserating applause, leaned over the desk, and pressed the hand of the trembling *débutant*. "Never mind, Silvio!" he said cheerfully. "All great men begin with a failure." Mr. Bond rose to reply. He was one of those persons whom one longs to see mortified, without much hope of ever having one's heart's desire. Self-possessed, smiling, debonair, with an easy flow of tolerable language, this man made poor Silvio's speech seem a greater deformity than it had seemed before.

Having made a smooth and trite reply to the previous argument, he sat down smiling, contented, and applauded.

"Is he a friend of yours?" Francis Elder asked of the enchantress at his side.

"No!" she replied with emphasis. "The feuds of

the Browns and Bonds are historical here. It is something about a cow and a wheat-field."

"Then you will not mind my saying that he is an ass," rejoined the young man.

"On the contrary, I am delighted."

There were several speakers; then Silvio rose again. Despair had given him calm, and his lost arguments and illustrations came back to him. After fifteen minutes he sat down, if not triumphant, at least not ashamed. He saw his father's head upraised again, and caught a beaming smile from Atalanta.

The "city chap" had been watched jealously all the evening by a large part of the young men present, but the unsparing applause he lavished upon everybody so allayed their suspicions that, when Mr. Bond proposed that "our distinguished guest" should favor them with a few remarks, there was a general clapping of hands.

The distinguished guest made the few necessary compliments not badly, and would have done well if he had seated himself as soon as they were uttered. But he had a voluble tongue, and liked to hear himself talk. He had been planning how he should describe this scene to his friends in Southport, and it seemed to him that the report of a speech from himself would be a very fitting conclusion. Silvio Heath's lamentable voice and confused argument, his hands and his tremors; Mrs. Brown's Roman nose, visible beyond the edge of her bonnet; Mr. Heath's clapping hands that sounded like two boards struck together; the potato candlesticks, — they would all make a very telling recital. Even his uncle, sitting there gravely at the desk, seemed to him ridiculous. The minister had withdrawn when the debate was half over, and with him the only check to the speaker's impudence.

The doctor began to grow uneasy. Glancing about, he saw that the greater number of the audience were listening in smiling complacency to remarks which grew every moment more bombastic. Atalanta was gazing in wonder at her cousin, James looked at his father, and Silvio Heath's eyes were fixed on the speaker with a frown growing over them.

"Let us go on, then, in this intellectual and patriotic race which we have begun!" cried the orator, with enthusiasm. "Let us examine and judge the great ones of the earth, in order to avoid their mistakes and rival their successes; and, scorning all impediments, take for our motto the words of the immortal Cicero." He gazed haughtily about him, lifting his right hand. "*Jupiter, Jovis, Jovi!*" he exclaimed. Then, raising both hands and eyes to the ceiling, added in a hushed voice, "*Jovem, Jupiter, Jove!*"

As he sat down there was a burst of applause. Some of the audience, especially the young ladies, had tears in their eyes. They may have thought that the language of the immortal Cicero was a remarkably alliterative one; but no shadow of a doubt crossed their minds. That they did not understand enhanced the effect. As with you, gentle reader, who know not how your soul is set vibrating by some sudden stroke of music, sight, or speech. It was the "touch beyond," the "*je ne sais quoi*," and their hearts were exalted as truly as if the voice of a Demosthenes had smitten them.

Master John Brown, however, was of opinion that the city chap was putting on airs; and, as the applause subsided, his voice was distinctly heard by those nearest him in perfect imitation of the speaker's voice and manner, —

"Jubijub, jubjub, jubjub! Ju-u-bjub, jubijub, jubjub!"

It might be said that John had hit the nail on the head.

His mother, who sat directly in front of him, turned majestically. "John!" and continued to stare at him for several seconds through her round-eyed spectacles.

He met her gaze mildly; but the moment her back was turned, revenged himself for this public reprimand by going through the same speech in pantomime, with his eyes fixed on the crown of his mother's bonnet.

John was of the school of Samuel Heath, who was now too old for such antics.

"You have been guilty of a piece of damnable ill manners, sir!" the doctor said in a suppressed voice, passing his nephew by, as the meeting broke up.

"Oh, Frank! father is so angry!" Atalanta whispered. "We all are; but you had better keep out of his way to-night. Walk down with Ann Eliza, and I will sit up for you."

"I once began the study of Latin," Mrs. Brown said to the young man, as they walked down the road together. "I was quite young; but it seemed to me — that is, I did not understand you to-night."

She spoke in a thoughtful, puzzled tone.

"Oh, it was an obscure passage, and not well chosen," he replied hastily, and changed the subject.

He was a little alarmed; for not only had Mr. Bond passed him haughtily without any salutation as they came out, but Silvio Heath, coming down to his side with anything but a courteous elbow, had given him the declination of *asinus* with a distinctness of utterance which it was a pity he could not have displayed earlier in the evening.

"Come, Silvio!" Atalanta said with authority, and marched him off homeward.

"You mustn't make any fuss about it," she said, her hand on his arm. "Frank meant no harm. They laugh at everything at Aunt Elizabeth's, and nobody cares."

"It seems to me," Silvio said, "that a person who is always grinning at everything is a monkey."

"Do you know what father says?" Atalanta asked. "He says that the theory of our having come up from the monkey may well be true, and that, undoubtedly, a large percentage of mankind are rapidly returning whence they came."

"Any one might think that I was going that way, by the fool I made of myself to-night," Silvio said gloomily.

"You mustn't mind one bit, Silvio. That is, you must try not to mind. I did just so when I was first learning to shoot. I couldn't keep my wrist firm, and every shot went into the sky. But I hit the bear, didn't I?"

"Yes, you hit the bear."

"But in one respect I am different from you," Atalanta went on, with her hand on the boy's arm. "You were quite pale, and, Frank says, I turned red. Difficulty sends my blood up, but brings yours down. I wonder what it means. I always begin to walk faster when I come to a hill, and you walk slower. I wonder what it is!"

"I think it means that you are more sure of yourself than I am of myself," Silvio said. "That gives you confidence."

"Well, then, go right to work to being sure of yourself."

They were at the gate, and the doctor and James

were already in the house. They bade each other good-night, and Silvio followed his family. Atalanta lingered in the gate, looking after him. She pitied him so! She was sure that he would not sleep that night. He walked between her and the light his brother carried, and she could see that he looked drooping.

"Good-night, Silvio!" she called out, lifting her clear voice from the shadows.

She saw him start, stop, and turn toward her, lingering a moment while a "Good-night" came back to her.

Then she went in and found her father standing and gazing into the kitchen fire. Everybody else had gone to bed.

"Francis has gone down a little way with the Browns," she said. "I will sit up for him, father. Do you want anything before you go to bed?"

On the whole, it was better so. Perhaps he had already said enough. "No; I don't want anything. Be sure to lock the door."

She brought him a candle, and smiled up into his face; and he bent to kiss her forehead, understanding that she had managed the affair.

Silvio went home with his heart like a bee-hive — all stings and sweets. Atalanta's last good-night had echoed like a bird-song in his ear all the way.

The lantern swinging in his brother's hand brought out a branch or rock with sudden distinctness, to let it go and catch another, and set fantastic shadows dancing everywhere. Their step on the smooth ground had a stealthy sound. No one uttered a word. Only when Silvio entered the gate, and turned to shut it, he leaned there one moment, looked down the road, and whispered, —

"Good-night, 'Talanta!" —

CHAPTER XXII.

LIZERANN.

Mr. Francis Elder apologized to his uncle for having quoted Cicero.

"I am glad that you don't excuse yourself, Frank," the doctor said. "Any one may do a thoughtless act. Beware what you ridicule. Tell me what a man laughs at, and I will tell you what he is."

The doctor did his nephew too much credit. Master Frank was not in the least sorry for his escapade. It was simply that he wished to prolong his visit until he should have taught Miss Ann Eliza Brown that he was her social superior, her superior in everything but beauty, in fact. She had unbent for one moment the evening before, only to sail aloft again to inaccessible heights the moment after. It annoyed him inexpressibly. He said to himself that he was becoming superstitious about her. She had risen in his path at the very opening of his career; and to fail in impressing her with a sense of his importance would be to insure his failure in the world.

She appeared at Beechlands the day after the debate, rather late in the morning, having walked up in a pair of kid shoes so tight that the wearing of them was an act of heroism. She had tried to allay her anguish by walking into a brook that wimpled along by the roadside; but the relief afforded by the cool water was so slight that, when Francis Elder, seeing her from afar, came out to meet her, she could

scarcely be civil to him. It was only after an hour's rest that a smile dawned upon her face, and even then she resisted all efforts to draw her out of the house. She had seen the waterfall, thank you! The cedar-ledge was very pretty; but there was too much sun in the afternoon. She refused even to go to the greenhouse, delightful place as that would have been for a flirtation. She was saving her strength for the evening, when she meant to walk home, accompanied by Mr. Elder. She could then have the heels of her shoes turned in without any one perceiving it.

Ann Eliza's hands and feet were rather large — the only blot, or, rather, four blots, on her otherwise resplendent beauty.

But, alas for her evening walk! Scarcely was their early supper over when a rattling equipage drove up to the door, and John Brown asked for his sister.

Ann Eliza grew white for a moment. If the wretched boy had waited for her in the road, with his horse's head turned homeward, she could have borne the disappointment; but the old clumsy wagon, in which they had never even gone to meeting, and the clumsy old horse with his head stuck as far in advance as his long neck would reach, — these were too much when presented at the very door. Then, to cap the climax, this long, rattling equipage had to be turned about before the eyes of the whole family assembled to witness her departure. It was infinitely worse than tight shoes.

"We haven't got our barouche out to-day," Ann Eliza remarked, recovering her courage presently. She addressed herself to Francis Elder.

"Isn't it a barouche?" he asked, smiling at her serious face. "I should not have known. When

you take a fancy to ride in a wheelbarrow," he said in a low voice, "you have only to smile on those you meet, and they will think that it is a gilded sedan-chair."

She smiled beamingly upon him, and murmured, "How foolish you are!" as she gave him her hand to be assisted into the wagon.

Only the pleasant confusion produced by so supreme a compliment could have made her commit the blunder of getting into the wagon before it was turned. She became aware of her mistake as soon as she was seated; and again a feeling of faintness swept over her. Instead of making an affable bow and disappearing from sight, she had got to be jerked about before them for at least ten minutes, herself and the whole equipage presented to the eyes of this city gentleman in every possible ridiculous position, front-face, profile, three-quarters, foreground, perspective, and in every kind of motion except a graceful one.

The backing and forwarding began; the yard, large as it was, not being large enough for so inexpert a driver to drive round in a circle. Then the horse was slow, stubborn, and stupid. Now, he shook his great head impatiently, and backed the wagon into the midst of the family, scattering them; then, as Ann Eliza was about to apologize to those nearest the wheels, she would find herself careering off to the barn at a literally rattling pace. The only thing she could do was to prove herself courageous, and that she did by laughing hysterically every time they ran or backed into anything.

At length the painful manœuvre was accomplished, and they paused for the one word more which always follows the last word. Francis Elder whispered something as he leaned over the great wheel to shake

hands, and received a bow and whispered reply. John swung his whip, pulled the reins, and called out "geddup!" and they were off.

Once in the road, Ann Eliza had purposed to give her brother a verbal lashing which he would not soon forget; but the sight of his hands trembling like aspen leaves, and the drops of perspiration that stood on his face, moved her compassion. Moreover, that parting whisper over the wheel had drawn the sting from her wounded pride.

"I was afraid that you were going to upset us, Johnny," she said.

"Ho!" said Johnny, "it's nothing to turn a wagon!"

In fact, he had himself been in terror lest the wagon should be overturned.

And what whisper could have consoled the mortified beauty, and changed her mood from leonine to lamb-like?

"I may go with you to see the cascade to-morrow?" he had asked, and she had nodded assent.

He went to see her, and they strolled out to a grove near the house, and seated themselves by a silver rustling ribbon of water that dropped over a high bank, between two trees, and disappeared underneath their roots. The trees above were beeches, now all a mass of leafy gold.

Seated on a gnarled and twisted brown root, dressed in her purple merino, Ann Eliza was not extinguished by her gorgeous canopy. Her smooth cheeks were of a deep pink, her azure eyes shone with a steady brilliancy, and her brow was as white as snow.

Francis Elder, sitting at her feet, compared her to some portrait of a royal lady enthroned. Every moment the impression she had made upon him

deepened. There was no flirtation, as he defined, and had expected it; no softness, no sign of gratified vanity. She sat there, contented, indeed, but cool, and received his homage. Nothing would induce her to descend from her height. He introduced the subject of matrimony, and she gave her views, which were those of an orthodox elderly person giving an example to the young. No wave of color crossed the cheeks; no tremor caught the fair fringed eyelids. He asked her if she would like to travel; and she declared that she should be perfectly happy to go abroad, and hoped to, some day; yet no tinge of consciousness betrayed any hidden thought.

It was very provoking. Yet he remained as long as he could, and left her only after having made another appointment. And, having met her twice, he was all the more eager to see her again.

A fortnight passed in this constant intimacy; then Mr. Elder went home, leaving everybody curious as to his relations with Ann Eliza, and everybody's curiosity unsatisfied. The young lady was a sphinx, even to her own family. She certainly did not break her heart when her admirer went away, though she was pre-occupied and serious. Secretly she was tortured by anxiety. Was she to win or fail? As yet it was doubtful. He had asked permission to write to her; but that might signify nothing.

Everybody found out that twice a week a letter came to Eliza Ann with the post-mark of Southport on it, and that once a week Isaac Perry took a letter to Shepherdsville to post for her. At Christmas one of these letters bulged wonderfully; and after that the young woman was observed to wear a very pretty ring with a pearl in it.

A new light beamed in her face after this, and be-

fore long she came out of her cloud, and confided her engagement to her family. It would, perhaps, be more correct to say that she announced her engagement, for she had scarcely the air of making a confession. Pride beamed in her face as she told of the destiny that awaited her.

Francis Elder had secured an appointment as vice-consul in one of the principal cities in Italy, and would go abroad in the spring; and she was to accompany him as his wife.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A SNOWSTORM.

The announcement of his nephew's engagement reached the doctor's family from Southport, and fell like the peltings of a hailstorm.

"Frank writes a very manly letter," his uncle said. "I didn't think it was in him. But the others" — he looked at the half-dozen of family letters which had come all together.

"Beechlands is fatal to all the race of Martin," his brother John wrote. "Don't invite me to visit you while your aunt is alive; for some siren would be sure to capture me. No son of mine shall ever set foot in your haunted forests."

"Do sirens live in forests, papa?" asked one of the boys.

"In mythology, no, my son; but in real life they are sometimes found there."

Mrs. Martin's letter was a feeble wail; Mrs. Elder's a furious tirade. Mr. Elder wrote that he thought Frank was a fool, but believed it to be the inalienable right of every free-born American to make a fool of himself, if he chose. He couldn't increase Frank's allowance. They must live on that, and what they could pick up.

"It's almost as bad as when you took me," remarked Mrs. Martin dryly.

"We will go right down and welcome her into the family this very evening," the doctor said with energy.

"She is a good girl. She's twice the man that poor Frank is."

"I'm so glad those cheeks are not going out of the family!" Atalanta laughed. "But how I wish they were going to live here. It would be so nice to have relatives close by."

Her father looked at her with eyes that showed anxiety. She was beginning to feel the need of other society than that which surrounded them.

"Never mind, daughter!" he said. "If they stay in Italy long, you shall go out and see them."

"Oh, father!" she cried, delighted.

That evening they all went down in a double sleigh to make the bridal call; and perhaps nothing in all the young beauty's success ever gave her the heart-felt pleasure she experienced when Mrs. Martin kissed her on the cheek, and said: "Now, my dear, you must call me Aunt Mary."

In all the country about the Martins were held to be an ideal family; and there were few distant honors which their neighbors would have considered to be greater than that of belonging to them. To call the doctor's beautiful wife "Aunt Mary" was honor, indeed.

As they drove swiftly homeward over the smooth road that night, the horizon all round was of a deep lead color. A moon just beginning to wane glittered in a thousand reflections over the snowy landscape; but it shone from the midst of an opal-colored aureole. "It will snow to-morrow," they said.

In the morning the sky was no longer blue, but a dull pearl color; and the sun rose shorn of his beams. The northeast was black in a few hours, and the pearl-white became pearl-gray. The sunshine failed to an idiocy of light; the sun, from a dull globe, lost

its outlines, lessened to a confused blur of light, and went out like a candle in mid-sky. It was the gradual closing-in of an atmospherical siege, and the family prepared for it.

Just after noon, small flakes of snow began to saunter down the air, few and far apart. The wind was rising gradually, and these flakes did not seem to alight anywhere; but after a while a thin moving veil of them lay over the discolored snow of former storms. The landscape grew dim, and narrowed in; the slender trees began to droop; a whirling whiteness took possession of the atmosphere, and darkened to thick night.

In the evening, when the house was all rosy with fires and lamplight, the doctor gave his children their stormy-evening entertainment, which was always the reading of some foreign author, or the description of foreign scenes. How enchanting it was, while they gathered about his chair, with the world they knew all a snow-drift, and a music of millions of frail crystals breaking themselves on the window-panes, to hear of gathering incense-gum from gnarled olive-trees, of roses in December and violets in January, of hedges of aloes stretching their tangled blades around acres of land, and palm-shaded villages under a limpid, azure sky!

"Get out your brushes and your blues, Jamie," his father said, "and paint me this scene in Asia Minor. Give me three ranges of amethystine mountains of every shade, looking over each other's shoulders, with a purple east behind them, and the west pale blue and gold. The sea is silver and dark blue, with craggy masses of indigo far off where the first Ægean islands show themselves."

Then they were at Stamboul, on the Sultana-Valide

bridge, with rattling wheels, trampling horses, and a motley crowd jostling them on the slightly raised foot-path. "Keep close together, or we shall lose each other in this crowd," their father said. And there they came upon a woman thrown down across the path, her forehead in the dust. Her whole figure was veiled in a coarse dark blue cover, like a bed-spread; only her right hand, palm upward, was stretched out on the ground, to be trodden on, or to receive an alms, as might happen.

Their last picture was a twilight off Cyprus, with Venus at her brightest, making a track of light across the sea to her own shrine.

Then they had glimpses of great souls, with words to keep in their hearts forever.

"There is no conqueror but God!" said the Moor.

"Virtue is more ancient than nobility," said the Spaniard, Aguilar.

Then they had some music, Atalanta singing a light, pleasant contralto to her mother's soprano.

"What a splendid voice mother's got," whispered Frank to Charles.

Charles nodded.

Maze, overhearing the remark, said to Kitty, "And isn't mother's hair pretty?"

Kitty looked critically, never having thought of her mother as pretty, but merely as useful. Her own hair was of a dead brown; and, besides, she did not like to have people suggest ideas to her.

"I don't like red hair very well," she said.

It was a pity that the children could not know how fair their mother was before she should begin to fade. From a beautiful girl she had grown to be a magnificent woman, and now, at thirty-five, showed no sign of spoiling. The doctor had kept the promise

made in his own heart for her; and in fourteen years of married life she had never been too tired and never too hungry.

Her generous impulse would have led her oftentimes to overdo, but a word from her husband checked her.

"It is not yourself alone whom you sacrifice in doing so," he said, "but my delight as well."

The children's last exercise that night was one in keeping the countenance. One by one they were to stand before the others, all seriously looking at them, be told not to laugh, and remain serious from three to five minutes. They all tried, and all, except Maze, with signal failure. To their surprise, she stood there full five minutes, looking at them, a little image of pathetic sobriety. The programme of expression followed by the others had been: solemn, severe, menacing, a grip of all the facial muscles, — and laughter.

"How did you do it, Mazy?" her father asked.

"I kept thinking of the time that mother was sick," she whispered.

"Brava! There's a lesson for reformers. Take pains to put the good in, and the bad will go out of itself."

"But, father," said Atalanta, pouting, "why did you tell us not to laugh, when we had no idea of laughing?"

"To teach you, miss, not to laugh without reason."

"But," Dick struck in, "there was reason. I was laughing at father for telling us not to laugh, when we hadn't anything to laugh at, and weren't going to laugh. I call that funny."

The doctor began to rub his forehead.

"Yes," added James, "you might as well tell us

not to eat the rest of that cake, when there isn't any cake to eat. Any one would laugh at that."

At this suggestion the three boys began to snatch at invisible cake and devour it.

"Mary," said the doctor, looking helplessly at his wife, "was it you who taught these goslings their logic?"

"I never taught them to reason against their father," she replied, "and now they must go to bed."

They were all hushed to sleep that night by the rustling of snow on their windows, and the occasional muffled rush of the northeast wind that brought a sound of clashing branches from afar.

Before going to bed herself, Mary went to visit her children, and tuck them into their beds, from eldest to youngest. James rather poh-pohed such attentions for himself, but he felt, nevertheless, a sense of intense comfort and peace, as through the little curtained window in his door he saw his mother's candle disappearing in a golden blur.

The younger boys had not arrived at the manliness of dispensing with this nightly visit. The three slept in one chamber, and three pairs of bright eyes looked out over the blankets when their mother came in.

"We've had an awful good time to-night, mother," said Charles; and the others echoed him.

How many a time in after life they would remember that large chamber under the roof, the snow rustling against the window, and the fair-faced mother, with her candle, bending over their warm nests to kiss them good-night! And how far more beautiful the picture would shine in their memories than any visionary or painted story of angelic visits, though Raphael held the pencil! They were happy then, but ever looking forward; nor knew that when

every other delight should have wearied them, their souls would turn for rest to just such a scene as this.

Oh, jewel in the present, let us not pass thee by! Pearl underneath the wave of bitterness, rose blooming where the thorns are thickest, we know that they are here for those who seek!

Nancy slept in a little bedroom off the kitchen, and she was in the habit of striking a match, when she woke in the night, and going out to see what time it was by the kitchen clock.

"I guess it's about half-past two," she muttered the first time she woke that night; and she went out to make sure.

The kitchen was silent and dark, except for her sputtering match. The cat slept in her box of wool, the dog between his blankets. Shivering as she drew her shawl close round her shoulders, Nancy lifted her match to the face of the clock, rubbed her eyes, and looked again. Six o'clock!

She went to the window to look out. That fine old master, Jack Frost, had covered all the panes with a series of Alpine scenes in high relief: mountains, gorges, pine-forests, precipices, and silvery plains covered with starry blossoms.

Nancy put her mouth, and, incidentally, her nose, to one of the Alpine ranges, and made a tunnel through it with her breath. To look through this opening was like looking into a feather bed. A troubled grayness was all she saw.

She returned to the clock. It ticked and hitched along with perfect regularity. Without a doubt it must be six o'clock. Sighing for her lost sleep, she took a long-handled iron shovel, and slipped it under a heap of ashes that lay between the andirons. A deft turn, and out sparkled a shower of live rubies

and carbuncles. She laid wood over them, and went to dress herself.

One by one the family gathered, and day opened, still with a heavy snowfall. After breakfast the whole family went to open what the doctor called the *porta santa*, the northern door, blocked half-way up with snow. The opening produced an avalanche, in which he momentarily disappeared. Shawls and brooms came to the rescue, and soon the stronger ones of the party, James, his father, and Nancy, were at work outside. Timothy was visible coming down the road, striking right and left with a snow-shovel. Joining forces, they set out for the barn, followed by all the boys. Even Willie wanted to go, and begged a fire-shovel from his mother. She tied a comforter down over his ears, tucked his first pair of trousers into his first pair of boots, and sent him out. Of course, his small shovelfuls did not reach the top of the bank, and usually fell back over himself; but he had such an air of earnest, conscious usefulness that it was a pleasure to see him.

The other boys would toss a few shovelfuls; then a flake or two at a time, thrown with contortions, as if using a tremendous force; then a full shovel would be so tilted as to spill its contents on the nearest head; then, in an ecstasy of high spirits, they would pitch into each other, and disappear in a cloud of snow.

When the morning's work was done, the four boys gathered around Timothy in the barn, and begged for a story. Timothy had a large repertory of wondrous histories, and such a dramatic way of relating them that they seemed more wonderful still. A stormy day was always their story day, as a stormy evening always meant that they were to sit up late, and be more than usually entertained.

They seated themselves, cross-legged, in a circle in a hollow of the hay-mow. Looking very much like some large, ugly bird about to feed her gaping young ones in the nest, Timothy announced his subject: "How Doctor Malone got put into jail."

Doctor Malone was one of two Irish doctors living in some unnamed town, the second being Doctor McGrath. Doctor Malone was described as a pleasant soul who liked to enjoy his money as he went along, owing almost everybody he knew, but a popular fellow withal, and a clever physician, when his faculties were not obscured by rum. A flask of Jamaica rum "in case of accident" was his constant companion.

The story opened weirdly, at midnight, at the gate of a cemetery, with Doctor Malone and his colored servant as *dramatis personæ*.

"When the docthor went into the graveyard he left Sambo to watch at the gate, pokin' him wid his elbow, and sayin' for a joke, Kape dark! An' says Sambo, says 'e, Faith, I's afeared it's all that I'll get to kape; manin' that the docthor had promised him an aigle. An' the docthor he went on feelin' his way among the graves, wid a spade in one hand and a sack in the other, till he came to a new-made grave; an' says 'e, The top o' the mornin' to ye, Jerry O'Flannagan, says 'e; though it's little the likes of ye has to do wid the time of day, says 'e. For why? You're six feet undther the ground, says 'e. An' thin he began wid his spade, stoppin' from time to time to lighten his task wid a tip o' the flask; which it is poethry that I'm talkin', begorra!

"An' Jerry, says 'e, it's defendin' ye from deformation of caracther that I am, says 'e. For that beggarly Docthor McGrath has said how ye died of a bothera-

tion of the liver from drinkin' too much rum, says 'e. An' don't we know that it wasn't rum at all at all, says 'e, but a bustin' of the heart on account of thim bedivilled Martha Washin'tonians, says 'e. An' ye'll niver mind me takin' a little liberty wid yer insides, whin it is to save yer reputation, says 'e.

"An' sure, Jerry, says 'e, ye wouldn't be grudgin' me a bit to remimber ye by, if I kape it in a jar of foin old rum for a tistimony aginst that slantherous cold-wather-livered Docthor McGrath, says 'e. For, Jerry, says 'e, be rasonable now for onst, says 'e, an' till me, if you plase, says 'e, what wud a liver be doin', I ask, in the corpse of a man that is dead, says 'e.

"An' the wake that we gave ye, an' the funeral a mile long, an' the hearse wid the feathers, an' the sermon in the church, wid Father Malooly poundin' the pulpit cushion, an' talkin' about Gabriel's thrumpet! An' did ye mind how I winked at ye? says 'e; for I was sayin' to meself, Faith, 'tis a spade is the thrump for you, Jerry, me boy!

"An' perhaps ye may think I'll be puttin' meself to an inconvanience a-carryin' ye in the sack on me own shoulders. But, niver you mind, Jerry, says 'e; for yer body'll not press wid the weight on me back that the loss of ye laid on me heart. An', musha, behave now, an' get into the sack like a gintleman, says 'e. An' excuse me for disturbin' ye this time of night, says 'e.

"An' wid that he took the sack on his back, and Jerry O'Flannagan was in the sack. An' he came to the gate where Sambo was waitin'; and Sambo, says 'e, go ahead, says 'e, an' whistle if ye see a policeman, says 'e. An' says Sambo, says 'e, First give me the aigle that ye promised me, says 'e. An' says

Docthor Malone, says 'e, Ye've made a mistake in the burd, says 'e, for it was a larruk that I mint, says 'e.

"An' wid that Sambo set off down the street a-shoutin' Fire! to the top of his lungs, and the policemen came a-runnin' from ivery direction, an' they surrounded Docthor Malone wid the sack on his back.

"An' what have ye got here? says one of the policemen.

"It's me poor grandmother that's just come over, says Docthor Malone. An' I'm takin' her home to support her in comfort for the rest of her days, says 'e. For she's a good an' pious woman, rest her soul! says 'e, forgetting himself in the botheration.

"An' seems to me yer grandmother is very cold, says one of the policemen, a-feelin' of the sack.

"Ye may say that, says Docthor Malone. An' by that same token, didn't ye hear me callin' out for a fire? says 'e. For I am very much afraid, says 'e, that the poor old lady is frozen to death, says 'e.

"An' no wonther, says another policeman, a-peepin' into the sack. It's enough to give an old woman her death o' cold, says 'e, to come a-thravellin' an' arrivin' in furren lands, an' a-goin' out by night, says 'e, wid nothin' on but a sheet wrapped around her, says 'e, an' a handkerchief a-tyin' up her jaws, says 'e. An' it's surprised that I am at her fer a rispectable old lady, says 'e.

"An', come, says 'e, to the station-house, says 'e. We've got an' illigant fire there, says 'e. An' if there's anything in this flask, says 'e, a-drawin' the flask out of Docthor Malone's pocket, we'll drink to the old lady's health, says 'e.

"An' that was the way that Docthor Malone got

sint to jail," Timothy concluded, with a sigh; "all for an' because of that flask bein' impty."

The story ended just as the dinner-bell rang, and the boys hurried into the house, stamping the light snow off as they entered. The windows being so snow-muffled, there was almost twilight inside, made rosy by fires. Mrs. Martin was taking off Willie's comforter and cap in the kitchen, and hanging them up to dry. The child had been nearly overwhelmed and terribly frightened by an avalanche which had descended upon him from the roof, and found himself something of a hero.

"Oi ain't afraid of snow as high as the house," he declared. "Oi can shovel right through it!"

"Don't, Willie!" said his mother. "I am sorry that you talk in that way."

"Oi can stamp the drifts right down!" he persisted, his little head thrown back.

"I shall have to read the story of Ananias and Sapphira," said Mary, looking at him seriously.

They all remembered certain occasions, when something like a falsehood had been detected, and how their mother had called them all about her, and read out this story from the Bible on her knee. Having read it, she would ask, "What is it that God hates?" and they would answer in chorus, "A liar!"

"The house looks like a snow-covered hill, mother," James said; "it will be pretty to-night, with the windows all pink."

"Dinner's on the table," said Nancy. "And 'Talanta's found a pictur."

"I found it inside the lining of that old valise in the attic," Atalanta was saying eagerly to her father.

It was an old ambrotype of a young man, whose

beautiful face looked out of a dark background, with an expression at once soft and earnest.

"Oh! I remember!" the doctor said, after a moment. "It is a young Italian, Alinori. I dined with them once, and admired this picture so much that he gave it to me. I couldn't imagine what had become of it."

"It's mine, since I found it," Atalanta said.

Taking her place at the table, she set the picture up against her glass. "He shall dine with us now," she said, and sometimes almost forgot to eat while her smiling glance rested on that beautiful face.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LATE LOVE.

THERE was a snowfall that same day in the Italian town of Ombra.

Fra Luigi, the old capuchin, who had for almost thirty years attended the old Countess Alinori, came up at six o'clock in the morning to say mass for her. She had already been in her chapel an hour. Seated in a rush-bottomed chair opposite the altar, with her feet on the rounds of another chair, on which rested her *scaldino*, lens, and prayer-book, she was saying her rosary. With the aid of a strong lens, she could still read clear print. But it was an effort, and she preferred the rosary.

The countess was now eighty-four years of age, half-blind, and very deaf, but still full of spirit and activity.

Fra Luigi had put on his vestments, and stood warming his chilled fingers at a *scaldino* while waiting for the man who was to serve his mass. This man, a cobbler of the vicinity, had gone to bring in Don Leonardo.

Presently they entered, Don Leonardo glancing at the second female occupant of the chapel, and trying to walk as if he were not lame. Gouty, bald, and trembling, at sixty-four he looked seventy. He took a chair near the door, and, kneeling as the mass began, fixed his eyes on Beatrice.

She was looking steadfastly at the altar, and seemed

unaware of his presence. She did not seem conscious even of the cobbler directly in front of her, though he usually occupied a good deal of her attention during mass. For the chapel was small, and his legs so long, that when he knelt the person behind him had an anxious moment.

The Alinori claims and titles had become very much simplified within the last few years, which had been inexpressibly bitter to them. If Giovanni Giorgini had died three years before, then his cousin Giovanni Alinori would have inherited, and all would have gone to his eldest daughter. But Giorgini still clung to life; and his cousin was dead, leaving only daughters. These daughters were all married, and their mother occupied an apartment in Palazzo Alinori, keeping a separate *ménage* with Don Leonardo.

The *sindaco* also was dead; and his son, whose miniature taken at twenty years of age we left Atalanta entertaining at dinner, Francesco, was now Count Alinori. He had married the girl selected for him by his mother, and was master of the palace. Moreover, he was now the heir of the Giorgini.

Beatrice was thinking of Francesco and his wife as she gazed at the altar, a gloomy frown on her brows. For years they had remained childless, but now a son was born to them; and they were still in the midst of the rejoicings and festivities which had greeted the long-hoped-for heir.

"He will love her better now," she thought. "And when the imbecile dies, she will go full of pride to take possession of my title and wealth."

An angry fire darted from her eyes.

"To be sure she is sickly!" was the next thought. Her face grew troubled and anxious. If his wife should die, would Francesco think of her then? No;

she was only a nameless girl, and his grandmother's companion. He liked her, he was always kind to her, he even had a sort of tender consciousness that she had always adored him; but she had no hope of being his wife.

A sigh; and then she thought: "When they go to Sanzio, Leo will be master here. It is better than nothing."

A faint scornful smile touched her lips; and, without looking at him, she became aware that Don Leonardo was gazing at her.

When, during the last few years, had he not gazed at her, if he could! Beginning with attentions which she had had to resent, and treating her always as an inferior, he had little by little become her slave. She hated him for himself, and for the wrong he had done to her mother; and she hated him for a wrong done to herself. There could be no doubt that he had broken up a match arranged for her by the Signora Mattei. That his own passion for her had prompted the interference was no excuse. At that time she had not dreamed of marrying him. He had never proposed marriage to her. He had not proposed now, indeed; but he was her slave, and only fear had prevented him. Both knew that whatever favor she should choose to give him would be received with rapture.

For several days now he had seen her eyes turn upon him from time to time with a calm and scrutinizing expression, which forbade him to speak, indeed, but did not forbid him to hope. Thoroughly cowed, he waited with a pleading dog's expression; ready to sneak away if she should frown at him, or if she should smile — not fall at her feet, for his legs would not permit that — but manifest his joy and

gratitude in whatever way might be possible to him, and permitted by her.

The mass was over; but Beatrice remained seated, and Don Leonardo did not stir. She usually went out at once, and he followed. She stayed till Fra Luigi had knelt down painfully to make his thanksgiving, and the cobbler was busy folding away the vestments. Then she rose to go out, and, passing near him, paused one instant, and looked at him with a faint smile.

He started and bent forward, and an eager glance and gesture of interrogation escaped him.

Still gazing, she slowly bent her head, half gracious, half mocking, and, stepping lightly past him, disappeared.

He grew blind for a moment. What was that pagan story he had read somewhere of an old man cut up and boiled in a caldron from which he issued young again? Don Leonardo was not learned in classical literature, nor indeed in anything else, except dissipation. And there was another story, a German one. Ah! he remembered Faust. It was a story after his own heart. Was he also undergoing a similar change? It seemed so, indeed.

When the mist had passed from his eyes, he went out. But the first movement he made dispelled all illusions regarding any magical Medean change. He was unmistakably old before his time, and unable to walk with comfort without a cane.

Beatrice was not in the little chamber next the chapel, where the old countess and Fra Luigi ate their frugal breakfast. He went out through the narrow corridor to intercept her when she should come back, as she was sure to; and as soon as he heard her step on the stair, opened a door, and beckoned her into a drawing-room there.

She entered, looking very pale, but resolute.

"Do you mean that you will marry me, Beatrice?" he asked, in a choking voice.

"Yes!" she answered, quietly.

She was not a beautiful woman, though she had beautiful moments, and this was one of them. She was sallow, and her eyes, though fine, were melancholy. Her manner, too, had that hesitancy and weakness natural to one not sure of her position, or the esteem of her associates.

Now she was confident, and quietly arrogant.

He stared at her in speechless rapture.

"They must not know this," she said, hastily. "Keep it from everybody till I give you leave to speak. To-night, while the servants are at dinner, I will meet you in the little chamber behind your anteroom. Leave the garden door open. Lock your door into the corridor."

He took the tips of her fingers, kissed them, and opened the door for her to go out; but not till a pair of eyes had seen them together. Nina, a little servant girl of the Countess Elena, slipped away as noiseless as a lizard.

After supper the count read his paper, and the old lady went to her chapel, while the servants ate their supper. Leonardo and his sister-in-law had their evening meal an hour earlier. The companion was free to do as she liked.

Beatrice stole noiselessly up a stair near the chapel, ran along the dim garden, where a thin veil of snow had fallen that day, and down the stair leading to Don Leonardo's apartment. The garden door stood open into darkness, but the faint light of a single candle shone from the room she had named for their meeting. At the door of this room Don Leonardo

stood, eagerly waiting for her. As she entered with the flutter and excitement of a flying bird, he held out his arms to her.

She repulsed him impatiently. "Do you think that I have come here for any such nonsense as that? Shut the door! Is the corridor locked?"

He obeyed her, deeply mortified.

"Now, please sit here," she said, indicating a chair opposite her own.

He seated himself.

"We have no time to lose," she said. "I have come to ask you what you wish and propose. We cannot talk together without being observed. Of course you know that everybody will be against us. Tell me quickly what you propose."

"To marry you the first moment you will consent to," Don Leonardo answered with ardor. "What do I care whether they are pleased or not? I have my own apartment, with a separate stair, if they should be disagreeable. For the rest, I wish whatever will most please you."

"If we are going to marry, there is no reason why we should delay," Beatrice said.

"Delays are dangerous!" he answered quickly.

"I will be ready in three days."

"Angel!" exclaimed the lover; and this time she permitted him to kiss her hand, though his touch made her shiver.

"Tell them nothing," she went on. "Make no explanation to any one. We will go to Sanzio to be married privately. Announce the bare fact that you are going to marry me, and announce it this evening. Will you do so? or will you be a coward, and retreat before their opposition?"

"Do you think me a coward?" exclaimed Don Leonardo.

She reflected a moment; then, "I am sure that you will act like a gentleman!" she said, and gave him her hand with a smile of such fascinating sweetness as no one but he had ever seen on her face.

"And now I must go," she added, hastily; and, evading his arm, with a coquettish laugh, ran tripping up the stairs like a fairy.

"If only he does not die!" she muttered, stealing along behind a grape-trellis, to screen herself from the kitchen windows. "I have waited too long. When the first plan failed, I should have thought of this."

The idea was a bold and splendid one: and, on second thought, she perceived that it had not been too long delayed. An earlier attempt would almost surely have failed. It was necessary first to disarm all suspicion; and it was necessary to have this man completely in her hands. If he escaped her, all escaped. Now he was her last earthly hope, and she was his. She had weaned him from all the others. She had no real fear of them; but only that he might die before she should have made him confess the truth to her.

She went to her own little chamber, and waited, listening to every sound. "Now the countess comes out of the chapel!" she whispered. "She will go to the dining-room, where Francesco is, before going to see the Signora Elena and the baby. Leonardo will be there. Oh, if I only dared to go to the closet! But Nina would be sure to catch me. She is everywhere. I must wait till I am called."

She softly opened the door into the long corridor, which led from her chamber to the dining-room, and, putting her head out, heard voices in loud dispute. It was impossible to resist. At all risks, she must try to hear what they were saying. In an alcove of

the corridor there was a closet through which dishes were passed into the dining-room from the kitchen. There was no escape from it, except through the corridor or the kitchen, and the sudden opening of a door, at either hand, might betray the fact that she was listening; but she ran the risk, and, tiptoeing along the corridor, pushed warily on the latchless closet-door. Something inside resisted. Nina and Ventura the cook had been beforehand, and were assisting at the family council over Don Leonardo's marriage engagement.

Beatrice returned to her room in a rage. "That I should have to tremble and shrink before the people who ought to tremble before me!" she thought, pacing her room. "I seem a criminal, when I am only a victim!"

There was a sound of a banging door, and a moment later the old countess passed through her own chamber and re-entered the chapel. She had been too much disturbed to visit the new baby and its mother, or go to bed immediately.

Beatrice took a sudden resolution. "I will face her now!" she said, and went to the chapel door.

"Do you wish for anything from me to-night, Signora?" she asked boldly.

"Nothing!" was the sharp reply.

"Good-night! Rest well!" she said, giving her usual evening salutation in a calm and untroubled voice, and was about going when she was called back.

She returned, and at a gesture from the countess closed the door behind her, and stood waiting quietly as if unconscious of any change in the relations between her and her protectress.

"So you do me the honor to consent to be my daughter-in-law!" exclaimed the old woman in a

voice that shook with passion. "I wonder that you should condescend to offer me service after that!"

Beatrice pressed her lips close together, stood firm, and looked at the speaker, but without uttering a word.

"It is infamous!" the countess broke out. "Do not you know that Leonardo's name was associated with that of your own mother?"

"My marrying him will prove my mother's innocence," Beatrice said in a very low tone. She had grown white at the taunt and at the boldness of her own irresistible reply; and the startled look of the countess, who stood one moment glaring at her in silence, made her tremble lest she might have betrayed her intentions too far.

"What are you marrying my son for?" demanded the old woman in a faltering voice.

"To have a protector," said Beatrice. "To have a place in the world, and a name."

"But you could marry some one nearer your own age and station. Leo is already an old man. It is foolish to pretend that you love him."

Beatrice was too wise to say that she did not, but she laughed a low-toned scornful laugh which was more stinging than any denial. It roused the old woman's anger again.

"Pray, by what name do you propose to be married?" she asked, laughing scornfully in her turn.

It was hard to dissemble, but she had served an apprenticeship to humility. "I shall do as Don Leonardo thinks best," she said, dropping her eyes. "I cannot prove my right to any name."

"That my son should marry a woman who has no place in the world!" murmured the countess, clasping her hands. "I have resigned myself to poverty; even

to let my children marry beneath their rank. But — no name, and no place in the world!"

"No place in the world!" repeated Beatrice, going nearer to her. She pointed to the picture over the altar. "Look at the woman you worship, the child you adore! A seamstress and a carpenter! And there was a doubt hanging over his birth. The same spirit which pushes me down, pushed them down. If you had lived then, and been a countess — perhaps your nobility is not so ancient! — you would have sneered at them as you now sneer at me. They did not wear glories round their heads then; and kings had not adored them!"

The countess was shocked, and found nothing to say. For many years the greater part of her time had been devoted to religious exercises, and she had really tried to discipline herself, and become what she considered a holy woman. She would not have liked to think that her piety was due chiefly to old age and a fear of death, or that she found it easy to practise humility only when people bowed down to her and insisted that she was their superior. This hand that tore away her trappings inspired her with terror.

"I have never been taught that, in being a Christian, I was obliged to abolish social differences," she said in a voice that had grown tremulous. "But when you speak of the Madonna and Christ, remember that they were of the royal line of David."

"David was a shepherd boy who distinguished himself," said Beatrice. "He was despised by his brothers, and crowned by the express command of God. He was chosen for what he was in himself." She turned away with a sort of despair. "It is true that only God can know!" she said.

Again the countess was silenced. She was more

than astonished at the sudden transformation of this woman, hitherto so quiet and unassuming. Her complacent conviction had always been that Beatrice revered her as a being of superior clay. She had had an impression that her companion would never marry, would remain with her as long as she should live; then be an assistant for Francesco's sickly wife, and a sort of governess for her son. According to her idea, understood, but never formulated, her companion was one of those women who seem created to be the dingy, useful, domestic fairy of happier lives. And now she demanded a life and a position for herself!

The countess sank into a chair, speechless.

Besides, her companion had changed as notably in look as in manner. Where was the sallow, thirty-years-old woman, with a droop coming in her shoulders, and a line between her brows? This woman stood proudly and defiantly erect; and she was beautiful.

She was glad that Beatrice left her without another word, for she knew not what to say.

Beatrice went straight to the dining-room. Her first victory had given her courage.

Francesco Alinori was there alone, walking slowly up and down the room. He stopped and gave her a lowering glance as she entered.

"A few minutes ago I found Nina and Ventura in the closet listening to a conversation of the family," she said with a slight smile.

He muttered something very like an oath, dashed open the closet door, and looked in. It was empty. He shot the bolt of the outer door, and returned. His face was very black. His uncle the husband of this woman, whom — let him own the truth to himself at

least — almost everybody secretly believed the rightful heiress of the Giorgini, what would happen to his own succession to the title? What did Leonardo know? What did he propose? It was Leonardo who, to revenge himself on the mother, had denied all knowledge of her marriage. Was it true that he knew nothing of it? Would he be capable of telling another story for love of the daughter? He could not without confessing himself a criminal!

Count Alinori had always felt and shown a certain tenderness for Beatrice, inspired not more by compassion than by a conviction of her immeasurable devotion to himself. Moreover, he found her fascinating at times. Dark as a cloud when the social sky was cold about her, every beam of appreciation or love brought out some grace and color in her. He had always been kind, though in a rather indifferent way; now, for the first time, he saw in her an antagonist.

She saw his anger with a sweet trembling of delight at heart. At last she was of consequence to him! That childish dream of hers that she should give him wealth and title with herself was all in vain; but this reality was almost as rapturous. She would search out her claim, yes, to the utmost: she would press the truth out of her mother's persecutor, though she pressed with it the last drop of blood out of his false, black heart; but Francesco should never suffer loss. What happiness if she could one day whisper in his ear: "I know that it is all mine; and I can take it if I will. But I will be forever silent for your sake!"

"Well?" she said, smiling, when he placed himself before her with a look that was almost threatening.

"So you have fallen in love with Leonardo!" he exclaimed with a bitter sneer.

She laughed a soft, low laugh of tenderness and triumph, and only looked at him, her head a little drooped aside. There was a rich color in her cheeks, a brilliant lustre in her eyes.

"It must be that you go to visit him," he went on insultingly. "We should all have heard the sound of his cane if he had hobbled the length of the house to visit you."

"I went this evening, Signor Francesco," she said gently. "It was for the first time. I wished to arrange some things with him, and to bid him tell you at once. There are so many spies about the house that to say a word which all the kitchen and from them all the town shall not know, one has to be secret."

"What in the name of all the gods do you want to marry that old cripple for?" he burst forth.

"Why should I not wish to marry, like everybody else?"

"A decent man; yes! But an old wreck like that! Besides, he was your mother's lover!"

She stiffened up like steel. "Francesco Alinori, let my mother's name alone! You know it is a lie, the thing you have said. I will forgive you anything but that. You know well I would forgive you anything that was cruel only to me. But I might hate you if you touch my mother's name. Leave the dead past in its tomb."

"I am willing to, if you consent," he said more gently. "But you must have a purpose in this marriage. What do you mean to do?"

She dropped her clasped hands before her, and looked at him with a sad earnestness.

"I mean to have a name which no one can deny my right to. I mean to have a little home of my own,

and a position among women. I mean to shut and lock my door with the feeling that I am mistress inside there, and that no one can insist on my opening. I mean to rise and go to bed, eat, go out, sing, dress as it shall please me, not as I am bidden by some one else. I am thirty years of age; and never once in all my life have I been able to say, At such an hour I will dine, and at such an hour I will go out for a walk. I must always ask permission." She lifted two white wrists, and looked at them, then stretched them out to him. "I can almost see black and blue lines round them!" she said.

He took the wrists in a strong grasp of both his hands. "Poor Bice! we will find you a husband, younger, and even noble, if you will. There is Alberto. He is healthy, and ten years younger than Leonardo. And he has a house of his own."

She stood with her eyes cast down, and coldly silent.

A step was heard in the corridor, and the count released her hands. "Grandmother is coming back!" he muttered, and made an involuntary motion toward the closet-door, then drew back again.

Beatrice hastened toward the closet, and the count followed her to shut the door. On the threshold she paused one instant. "Do not believe that I could ever do you a harm, or cause you a loss!" she whispered.

A glance flashed between them, and the door was closed and bolted when the hand of the old countess touched the other lock.

The count returned to his grandmother as if he had been walking up and down the room.

"Checco," she said, "we may as well consent, and make the best of it. Beatrice is determined, and Leo

is mad. I hoped to move her, but I cannot. We cannot resist — at least, not openly."

"Very well, grandmother!" he said, uneasily conscious that the one she spoke of was listening. "I wash my hands of the whole affair. Order it as you please."

The old woman sighed heavily. "From the time almost that he could walk alone, Leo has been a cross to me," she said.

"Don't let us talk any more about it to-night," he answered impatiently.

The countess sighed again, and went, her head bowed down.

"'At least, *not openly*'!" repeated Beatrice, as she came out of the closet, and looked along the corridor at the figure of the old woman, disappearing into her room. "Intriguing old hypocrite!"

She waited a moment, then went to a stair at the end of the corridor, and softly up into the garden. Would he expect or hope to see her again that night?

He hoped, certainly; for the door was open yet; and it was well for her own interests that she had come. The opposition, almost menacing, of his nephew, his mother's declaration that she would never consent, combined with the chill of winter and age to dampen his courage. Then, how did he know what might be done to him! His own guilty conscience, full of terror, began to fill his imagination with a swarm of ghastly visions. He was old and helpless, and he had no one to protect him. His nephew had said, "Do you fancy she will care for you? She will use you for her own ends, and then want to be rid of you. You know well that she must hate you!"

He was repeating the words in his mind, and almost

shrinking in terror from the thought of Beatrice, when she came to him a second time, took his chilly hands in her warm ones, chafed them softly, and laughed with her breath in his face. "They have consented!" she whispered.

"Consented!" he echoed, blankly.

"Yes. They could not have hoped to conquer you, except through me. They thought to frighten me away, and they have failed. I have seen them both, and then I listened. They give up all open opposition. But they may try some other way. We must be wary. Get everything ready to-morrow. The day after, we will go to Sanzio and be married. Tell nobody except the Sor Chiara Mattei. She will arrange all for us, she and Betta."

"Yes!" he said, only half glad, receiving her light caress, but without response. "But, Beatrice, what do you think they might attempt secretly? Checco would be capable of poisoning me!" He shuddered.

"I have settled that," she answered. "Checco is afraid that, once married to me, you might try to establish my claim to the Giorgini inheritance. I have told him clearly that I have no such foolish vision. Besides" — she laughed — "Checco believes that I am in love with him, and would do nothing to harm him. You must pretend to be jealous. It will be a safeguard for us. Do you understand, stupid?"

She patted his cold hand with her soft palm.

He began to smile, but with jealousy already waking in his eyes.

"Leonardo," she said, growing serious as she rose to go, "do in all things just as I tell you, and you will do well. Remember Gio Giorgini. It is a watchful wife who has kept him alive all these years. Do not listen to any advice but mine. What do they

care for you? They all think that, for you, life with all its joys is over; just as they think of me, that life and joy are never to begin. Do you believe that they will try to influence you for anything but their own good? You know they will not. We stand alone, you and I, Leonardo, and have no hope except in each other. Are you firm?"

"I am firm!" he exclaimed. "I will stand by you against the world!"

"And now I must go!" she said. "Wait till I see if the stair door is still unlocked. If they have locked it since I came out, you must let me through by your door."

"Stay!" said her lover, all his tremors gone now. "I will show you another way you never knew. No one in the house knows it but mother and me. Neither Checco nor Elena has ever heard of it."

He led her to his dressing-room, where under a wash-basin in a niche was a large iron tray set in the floor, pierced with holes for water to pass away into a drain.

"You pull this little nail out," suiting the action to the word, "and you can lift the tray. The tray is double, and the water passes off sideways."

He took the tray out and showed a dark cavity large enough for a person to enter. Letting the candle down, a narrow stairway became visible.

"From this stair there is a door into the bedroom back of the long drawing-room. It is hidden behind a light wardrobe."

"How shall I reach my chamber?" asked Beatrice, half shrinking.

"By the wardrobe chamber. That is the nearest. Then you can go on by the corridor, the kitchen, or the drawing-rooms."

She took the coil of wax taper he lighted for her, and entered on the secret stair. "Keep it open till you think I am out of this," she whispered.

It was a rough and narrow passage between stone walls, and it soon brought her to a little door bolted on the stair side. The bolt slipped smoothly, and the oiled hinges turned without noise, carrying the weight of a small wardrobe. She entered a chamber with which she was already familiar. It was lighted by a single window high up in the wall, reached by steps, and looking into one of the dark courts under the garden embankment.

Closing the door noiselessly, she listened a moment, then slipped out into an anteroom.

Before her was a long corridor, and from the door of a near chamber a faint light shone out through a half-drawn *portiera*.

Stepping warily forward, Beatrice looked into the room. On a monumental bed, curtained with blue silk that increased her already startling pallor, lay the Countess Elena, asleep. Near the bed was a lace-draped cradle, with the tiny head of an infant on the pillow. Nina stood at one side, her hand touching the cradle, as if she had been rocking the babe, her face upturned, smiling and ingenuous, to look at Count Francesco opposite. With his hands clasped behind his back, he gazed fixedly at the sleeping infant, his brow gloomy and his mouth stern.

Beatrice gave but a glance, then fled along the corridor, and noiselessly regained her room.

CHAPTER XXV.

MADAMA.

The next morning, when Beatrice was leaving the chapel after mass was over, the old countess detained her.

"I have an announcement to make to you, Fra Luigi," she said to the priest, who had just taken off the chasuble, and was fumbling with the girdle round his spacious waist. She took Beatrice's hand and led her to him. "I present to you my future daughter-in-law, and Don Leonardo's wife."

The monk bowed gravely, without betraying the surprise he felt. "I congratulate you!" he said, and bowed again to Don Leonardo.

The countess turned to her son, who had risen. "Make her as happy as you can, Leo," she said. "I withdraw all opposition."

She made a slight, graceful reverence, half bow, half courtesy, and looked at the two with a smile of resignation inexpressibly sweet and sad.

Don Leonardo kissed his mother's hand with a murmured "Thanks!" And there was a moment of silence that for the two so favored was both painful and humiliating. They felt like culprits who had been forgiven, but who had lost caste in some way. The calm, observing look of Fra Luigi, and the sweet, courteous grace of the countess, seemed those of persons above all criticism.

But the chapel was no place for conversation.

Beatrice courtesied and went out, and Don Leonardo followed her.

"I can have all ready for to-day," he said eagerly. "Why should we wait? Who knows what may happen! Will you go to-day?"

Sure enough! Why should they wait? She considered a moment, and consented.

"Go down to Palazzo Mattei at eight o'clock," he said eagerly. "I will send her a note at once, telling her to be ready. You will both come to the Schizzo Bridge, where I will wait with a carriage. Antonio is going to Sanzio at seven o'clock. I will give him a note for a priest I know there. Can you be ready?"

"Oh, yes!" said Beatrice, with some bitterness. "I have no *corredo* to prepare."

It was only half-past six as yet, and there was time for all they had to do. Don Leonardo went out at once, and Beatrice ascended to the kitchen.

"I have prepared your coffee for you, Sor Beatrice," said the cook, and gave her a tumbler of coffee all a-froth with the beaten yolk of an egg.

She received the unusual attention with thanks, and made a pretence of tasting the coffee; then suddenly cried out: "Oh! there is a spider in it!" and ran to throw the whole out into the court beneath.

She watched Ventura prepare a second glass, and drank it; then arranged the little breakfast-tray, and followed when Nina carried it in.

Fra Luigi and the countess were already seated at a small table before the window in the room that served them as ante-chamber to the chapel. Both over eighty years of age, there was something venerable in their quiet simplicity. The capuchin's dark brown robe contrasted well with a face still delicately

rosy, and with the fringe of snowy hair that surrounded his bald head. The countess was pallid, and her dark hair only gray as yet. Her eyes were dim and sad, as eyes always look sad which do not see well. A black shawl wrapped about her shoulders, and a black silk handkerchief laid over her head, made her paleness more observable.

Nina set the tray down, and Beatrice placed before the two their frugal breakfast, — for the countess, a bowl of broth and a roll: for the monk, two rolls and a glass of coffee, with beaten yolk of egg.

"I shall not allow you to do this any more," the old lady said, smiling up into her face, and taking her hand as she stood near the table. "To-morrow Nina must serve, and carry your coffee to you."

It seemed gracious; yet a momentary faintness passed over Beatrice. It was pulling up one of the roots which had held her all her life. It meant that she had no longer any place there except as Leonardo's wife. And what if he should die that day! What if her husband and sole protector should vanish even as her mother's had!

She only bowed. "I would like to go out this morning," she said, "if you have no need of me."

"But can you not understand that you are your own mistress?" the countess insisted gayly. "Do as you please in all things. Would you like to have Nina accompany you?"

"There is no need, thanks. I am only going to the Sor Chiara's."

The old lady's face clouded over at the name, and she remained silent. Aldegonda's mother-in-law was not a favorite in the family.

Beatrice went to her own room, and made what preparation she could make for her marriage: then

she sat down by her window to wait. She felt desolate and frightened. Stripped of smiles and compliments, the real meaning of it all was that she had been turned off. It was well that they were to be married that day, for another meal eaten in such an atmosphere would have choked her. She repeated the words that she had overheard the night before, — "at least not openly!" No; they would not insult her. They would be elaborately polite, assure her that she was independent, and act as if she could not need one finger of a helping hand in anything. She would be met as a guest, and in a way to suggest that a guest should not stay too long.

"Oh, merciful Lord, let him not die to-day!" she prayed. "Once his wife, I am safe. All that he has is mine."

She looked out into the garden, and saw a few snow-flakes fluttering down from a cloud that just covered the town, leaving the horizon all bright, except on the mountain-top, from which the cloud extended like an arm from a shoulder.

"I must have a bridal bouquet," she said, and hastened up into the garden.

There were a few jasmines in the glass-house, and a rose-bud out in the garden. They would do to drop on the threshold of her new life. She hid them in her dress, and went down to her room again.

The snow came down more thickly. The cloud seemed fixed on the mountain-top, but the horizon grew dim. All the narrow, curved olive-leaves held tiny heaps of snow in their dark little scoops; the large, polished lemon-leaves were dusted with white that slid off, and gathered again; and the lemons, some yellow, and some green, had each a little cone of white on the upper side. The green and gold

showed well beneath this silvery veil. Lines of down formed themselves along the smooth, brittle branches of the fig-trees, and each dead vine tendril caught a flake or two in its gray spirals.

In the street, in front of the palace, children were coming out to make tracks. A foot set on this thin veil took it quite up, and left its print in gray; as on a dewy summer morning one's tracks are green on the silvery grass. The little girls held their skirts tightly about them, and looked back over their shoulders as they walked; the boys dragged their feet and spoiled the tracks the girls had made.

Then the cloud parted, and the sun came out; and in half an hour there was no sign of snow in street or garden. But the mountain behind reared itself into the blue a mass of ineffable whiteness.

"It is wearing white for me," Beatrice said, pointing back from the carriage where she sat with Don Leonardo and the Signora Mattei.

Toward evening, the carriage returned; but this time there was no concealment. It stopped at the *portone* of Palazzo Alinori, and the bridegroom helped his bride out, and led her upstairs. Beatrice looked at her husband with gleaming eyes to see if he were equal to the occasion, and found him as dignified as she could wish. He was a gentleman, though rather a dilapidated one.

But they had no battle to encounter. Before they had touched the bell, the door was opened by Nina, who gave them a smiling and obsequious welcome. The door leading to Don Leonardo's apartment was open, and a bright light was visible inside. As they entered the ante-room, the old countess came out to meet them, with a very red spot on each cheek.

"You are welcome home!" she said, and kissed

Beatrice. "I have taken the liberty to prepare your rooms a little."

She led them into their own *sala*, bright with a score of wax candles, and a fagot of vine and olive twigs burning on the hearth. There were flowers in the vases, and the covers had been removed from two large arm-chairs which showed their red satin cushions only on great occasions.

"You have given yourself too much trouble, countess," said Beatrice, with smiling courtesy.

"No; it was only my duty," was the equally smiling response.

"Thanks! Thanks!" repeated Don Leonardo, finding voice. "You are very kind, mamma!"

He bent and kissed his mother's cheek with a very genuine emotion; but Beatrice, watching with a side-long glance, saw that he might as well have kissed a statue for any response which his caress awakened.

"Come and see what I have done!" said the old lady, assuming an air of gayety. "I fancied you might wish to have a table of your own." She opened the door into a small and perfectly ordered kitchen. "But," she added, "of course I expect you to dine with us this evening. Dinner will be ready in half an hour. And now I will leave you to yourselves. Whatever you want, ring, and Nina will serve you at once."

"A thousand thanks, contessa!" said the bride, with a graceful superficial effusion. "It is really too much courtesy."

They escorted her to the door of the ante-room; and Don Leonardo would have accompanied her to her own room if he had not been absolutely forbidden. There were bows and courtesies, and the door closed at last when her step ceased to echo along the corridor.

The two returned to their own *sala*, and faced each other an instant before speaking. Then, "Mamma has behaved very well," said the gentleman.

Beatrice laughed lightly. "Mamma always behaves well when she has had five minutes to recollect herself," she said. "Have you never observed that in every comedy she makes a fine figure in the last scene, and I, or whoever may oppose her, a sorry one? I hope that you are not going to be overcome by too great a sense of gratitude."

"Why should I not feel grateful to see my beauty received as she ought to be!" exclaimed the bridegroom, becoming fond.

She wrenched herself away from him. "Don't be silly," she said.

A little later there was a tap at the door, and the count and his grandmother appeared to announce and escort them to dinner.

A stranger looking in upon the company would have pronounced it a very pleasant one, though the gentlemen might have seemed rather serious, and a stranger most certainly would never have suspected that the two ladies had lived in an intimate domesticity for years. The dinner was a festal one: the best wines were brought out; and if the bride had been an heiress sought for and beloved by all the family, bringing with her rank and fortune, little Nina, who served the table with the deftness of a trained waitress, could not have worn a more joyous and congratulatory expression.

Perhaps the gloomiest person present was the bridegroom. He had thought Beatrice his social inferior; and while fascinated, even infatuated, by her personality, an undercurrent of conviction had always reassured him with the thought that she was improving her position in marrying him, and that he was, in

reality, her benefactor. But when he saw her able to hold her own against his mother, smile for smile, ignoring with her everything which had preceded her present station in the house, his heart misgave him. He had sought an upper servant, and he found himself bound to a fine lady who, so far in their married life, had treated him with disdainful carelessness. While he listened to her light and laughing voice, the words of his nephew recurred to his memory, "She is marrying you for a purpose of her own."

Dinner over, they were again ceremoniously escorted to their apartment, and at length found themselves alone.

Beatrice was looking rather splendid. In honor of the dinner she had put on an old dark blue brocade dress, her grandmother Lanciani's wedding-dress. There was a shimmer of gold threads through it, and a gold lace in the neck and sleeves. In her dark, picturesque hair was a bunch of white jasmine. One saw that she was beautiful then. More than once during the dinner the count's eyes had rested on her with an unwilling, suspicious admiration, and her husband's with an admiring fear. What was he that he should have married such a woman!

"Well, the ordeal is over," she said, throwing her arms up over her head with a yawn. "The gods and goddesses have let me pass unscathed. I am a signora. You observed, did you not, that no mention was made of relationship. I was the 'Signora Beatrice.' Now you have got a housekeeper of your own. And they are going to give me Nina."

"And now you are free to love some one else," he said, looking at her askance, already jealous.

"Was I not already free to do so?" she asked, staring at him.

"You could not have had both love and position," he said.

Her arms had slipped down, and an air of decision had replaced her careless languor. She pointed him to a chair, and seated herself in a higher one opposite him. It was one of the red satin gilded arm-chairs, and she looked regal in it.

"Now let us understand each other," she said, looking down from her height of youth and new-born will. "I will be kind to you when you permit me, but I will have neither insults nor annoyances from you. I shall punish you for the speech which you have just made. Everything of the kind that you say will always be worse for you. Whatever you accuse, or suspect me of, that I will hold myself free to do, if I please to do it. And I will never defend myself to you, but only from you."

He stared at her, pallid and silent.

She leaned forward to lay her hand on his arm, looking with a charming smile into his stricken face. "I mean to be very good to you as long as you are good to me. When any one asks me, as Francesco did, what I wanted to marry an old broken-down *roué* for, I shall speak of you respectfully. No one shall speak to me against you. If you have any manliness left in you, you will defend me in the same way. We need to stand by each other. It will be your fault if we lead a discordant life; and they would be triumphant. They are all against us. Act like a man and stand by me, and you will preserve your dignity. If you show jealousy, people will laugh at you. It is ridiculous for you to think of love. If you had married when you were young, and lived a decent life, you would now have the sort of affection suited to your age — that of children and grand-

children. You chose a career of dissipation, and you have your reward. Make up your mind to accept the situation. Be thankful that you have a young woman to be your constant companion, to take care of you when you are sick, and give some thought to your amusement when you are well; and put all thought of sentiment and jealousy out of your mind."

He held the hand she gave him, loosely in his own, and remained silent. Old reprobate that he was, in whom no woman had ever found the truth, he could not believe any woman's word except when she told a lie. He had thought to secure Beatrice's gratitude; and if she had sworn that she loved him, in his senile folly he would have believed her. Her pitiless truthfulness crushed him.

She rose and stood before him, looking complacently at the shining folds of her dress, showing a golden lustre in the clear, soft illumination of the candles. These candles had been prudently extinguished during dinner, but when coffee was set on the table, Nina had skipped back and lighted them again.

"What are you going to have me called now?" she asked, holding back the dress, and slipping her small foot in and out under the stiff rich border.

"Why, your name is Beatrice," he said, hesitatingly, still with that shocked look in his face.

"Of course! I mean what title will you give me?"

"I have no title," he said faintly; and, after a moment, with an almost menacing look, "neither have you!"

"I have not renounced it, as I proved this morning," she whispered, with a steely smile, looking steadily into his shrinking eyes.

In fact, the registry of her marriage had been, as to

length, an almost royal identification, it having been found that her baptismal registry called her by her mother's name alone. With all the other description necessary, she had insisted on inserting the clause: "claiming to be the legitimate daughter and heiress of the late Paulo Giorgini."

She had brought Don Leonardo to consent to this parenthesis, while they were driving over to Sanzio.

"Because some people say that I am your daughter, and that you claimed me," she said. "Every precaution must be taken against such a horrible slander."

And then, for the same reason, there had been a dozen witnesses called in to their marriage, and the record had been read to them all, and several copies made of it.

At the time, blinded by her smiles and seeming affection, he had only the thought that she was his. The mode was of little importance to him. Now some sense came over him that he had been entrapped.

She pushed a footstool nearer to him, sank down on to it, and laid her arms across his knees, smiling up into his face.

"I have drawn up a paper that I want you to sign," she said. "Of course our marriage puts an end to all the old slanders; nevertheless, I want the signature." She drew a folded paper from her pocket and read:

"I, Leonardo Alinori, hereby solemnly swear, that, as far as I know, Beatrice Lanciani, claiming to have been the wife of Count Paulo Giorgini, was a virtuous maiden and a virtuous wife."

"It is nonsense to rake up all that past!" Don Leonardo exclaimed, violently. "I will have nothing to do with signing such papers. Nobody talks any more of that. You will do more harm than good." He breathed heavily, and, pulling out his handker

chief with a trembling hand, began to wipe his forehead.

Beatrice pushed a writing-table to his elbow, and then sunk into her former position at his feet.

"Your mother raked it up, and flung it in my face only yesterday," she said. "Sign!"

"What do you want of the paper? What are you going to do with it?" he asked, still angry, and almost pushing her away.

She only pressed her arms more closely across his knees, and her eyes were fixed steadily on his, which would not meet them. "I shall show it to any one who may slander my mother," she said.

"I tell you, I know nothing of her marriage!" he exclaimed, trying to rise.

She pushed him gently back again. "How strange that you should excite yourself so, for such a simple thing," she said, in a cool, quiet tone. "The paper does not say that you knew anything of her marriage. Read it yourself. There are your strong lenses. It only says 'as far as I know.' It is negative. You only testify that you personally know nothing against the mother of your own wife. One would think that it was easy to say as much, if it were true. Leonardo, did you know anything against her?" Her hands grasped his arm like an eagle's claws.

"No!" he answered, abruptly.

"Then read."

He read slowly, over and over, weighing every word, pushed back his chair a little, drew it forward again, finally took the pen and signed.

"Thank you!" his wife said sweetly; and, after carefully drying the signature, folded the document, and put it into her pocket.

"And now for my title!" she said gayly. "I am

to be called madama. You must call me Madama Beatrice when you speak of me to the servants, or any one of that class. You won't forget?"

"No, I won't forget!" he answered hoarsely, without looking at her.

"And then," she pursued, in the same gay tone, "I shall always call the signora, my dear mother-in-law" — she laughed, — "contessa. That will oblige her to give me all the title my circumstances allow. No one can object to madama. Nina, too, will help a good deal, once she has a hint. She is very quick to take a hint."

"Yes," said the sombre bridegroom; "Nina is very quick to take a hint."

CHAPTER XXVI.

NINA.

Nina was quick to take a hint. She was quick in everything. She accomplished her work in half the time an ordinary servant would take, and did it better. She anticipated orders, was watchful, and said but little. She never assumed to be in any person's confidence, denied that she was so, and pretended to be ignorant concerning the affairs of her master's house. If a secret commission were given her, she executed it perfectly, and then, apparently, forgot all about it. She was always cheerful, always respectful, and never tired. Her small, neat figure and small, pale face were agreeable to the sight, and you would sometimes find beauty in them — not a soft, young beauty of innocent flesh, — but a fine, marble beauty, like some little Parian statuette.

If reproved, she did not resent. She would drop her small eyes, and stand listening to all that you had to say, never sulking, never even embarrassed. At times she would own, with quaint frankness, that you were quite right, and she quite wrong, though never intentionally so.

But she was very seldom reproved, being far too well behaved, and anxious to do her duty. Apparently, the service she was there to do was the joy and pride of her life; and she desired no other pleasure. She made friends everywhere, high and low; and lost no opportunity of ingratiating herself with people.

You might observe, too, that common people, going to Palazzo Alinori for favors, went to Nina first. It often happened that when they did not, they failed to obtain what they wanted.

She was always prettily and modestly dressed, but always according to her state in life. Sooner than presume to carry a parasol, she would have scorched her face and head for hours in the hottest summer sun; because it was no more proper for a person of her class to carry a parasol in the street, than to sit under a *baldacchino* in the house. As for putting a bonnet on her head, and going out with it there, she would sooner have been taken to prison. She never seated herself in the presence of a lady or a gentleman, unless invited to do so, and would stand till ready to faint away if not invited. If caught in any act she could not defend — like listening at the door, or taking a sly sip of wine, or a sweet, — she humbled herself abjectly, wished to kneel for pardon, and begged you to trample on her, or cut her head off. But such occasions were rare, even at first, and soon ceased altogether.

You might suspect her sometimes; but it was difficult to catch her. She was never far away from the room where a private conversation was held; and the doors were almost always left ajar when she passed. Her light quick feet went noiselessly from end to end of the palace, and from top to bottom, and fled at any approaching step. In short, she was a treasure of a servant to her employers and to herself.

It was to this girl that Beatrice confided her dignities; and she was not disappointed. Little by little the title she coveted was given her, respect grew up about her, and her past died out, if her hoped-for future did not come.

"What is this nonsense about Beatrice?" the count asked his mother one day. "I hear people calling her madama. Is it your doing?"

The old countess smiled. "No, Checco. I fancy that Nina is responsible." She raised her voice slightly and called out, "Nina!" and the girl, whose heel-tacks had been heard going briskly about in the adjoining chapel, presented herself immediately. She dropped a duster from her hand, and looked at them with a pleased half-smile of expectancy, as if to serve them were her delight.

"Nina," said the count, "did the Signora Beatrice tell you to call her madama?"

"No, Signor Count!"

"Then why do you call her so?" he asked sharply.

"I heard Don Leonardo speak of her that way; and it seemed to me that I ought to follow," she said modestly, looking down, and seeming to blush; though the smooth pallor of her little face did not change any more than if it were marble. "Besides, I was afraid that I might forget and call her Sor Bice, as I used to; and that would have been a disrespect to Don Leonardo."

"You are quite right, child!" said the countess. "Continue to call her so. For me and Elena, being countesses, we are content to be called simply signora. It is the novelty that takes. I am sure, Nina, if you were to marry a nobleman, you would have no greater pleasure than to hear yourself called madama."

"Oh! it is impossible that I should ever marry a nobleman!" the girl exclaimed with a child-like smile. "No one would stoop to me; and if he did, I should be afraid."

This was one of the speeches which made it easy for the Countess Alinori to practise Christian humility.

"Oh, Nina, we shall be all alike in heaven, my dear!" she said, and smiled affectionately in waving her away.

While this conversation was going on in one part of the house, Madama Beatrice was talking with her husband in another part. They had been married a month, and the excitement in Ombra was beginning to diminish. It could not be denied that the bride behaved very well. She went out only to church on *festa*-days, and then to an early mass. For the rest, she seemed devoted to her husband. The neighbors saw them walking up and down the garden every day for hours, and they had learned that she kept her house well. No one had called upon her as yet; but it was understood that after a certain probation she might receive a carefully measured civility, in case the Countess Alinori should wish it.

"It was a shock to me," the old countess said to her friends; "but I have made the best of it. I have tried to console myself with the thought that she will take care of Leo when I am gone. I knew nothing till the evening before they were married; and did not know that they meant to marry at once, till the ceremony was already performed. I had thought to have Fra Luigi marry them in my chapel. But when I sent Nina down to ask the Sor Chiara Mattei to come up to see me, and found that she and Beatrice and Leonardo had all gone privately to Sanzio, then I knew what it must mean. It seemed that after fifteen years of intimacy, I might have been told. But we old people must not expect too much."

She smiled sadly, and sighed. She had not uttered a word of blame, and flattered herself that she had done no harm; yet those who listened thought her daughter-in-law intriguing and ungrateful.

"Come, Bice, to the *piazza*, and hear the music," her husband said. "You can't remain forever shut up."

He was himself impatient of the house, and of the little recognition his wife had received.

"How can I go out with you, when people say such things!" his wife exclaimed. "They say that you spoke against my mother. It makes me ashamed of myself and of you. It was infamous of you to marry the daughter of the woman you slandered."

"Who tells you these lies?" he asked angrily. "Send them to me, and I will soon silence them."

"But are they lies, Leonardo?" she asked, leaning on his shoulder, and seeming to weep.

"Of course they are!"

"You never said a word against her?"

"Never! I swear!" he answered, secure in thirty years of silence since his word had ruined her.

"Then write it for me!" she said eagerly.

"What nonsense! I have already given you one document."

"I burnt it up by mistake," said Beatrice. "Write me another."

She ran to get pen, ink and paper.

"When we come back, I will write it," he said.

She sat down and put her hands over her face.

"Well, then, what shall I write?"

She caught the pen and wrote, "I, Leonardo Alinori, solemnly swear that whoever says I ever uttered a word against the character of Beatrice Lanciani, who claimed to be the lawful wife of Count Paulo Giorgini, is a slanderer of her and me."

"Copy it all yourself, and sign," his wife said, putting her arms around his shoulders to press him into the chair she rose from. "Copy it carefully."

She stood with her hand pressing his shoulder, and watched every word he wrote; then took the paper and read it over once more after he had signed it.

"You had better let me keep it," he said.

"Oh, no! I will take better care this time," she answered. "And now we will go to the *piazza*."

He had breathed heavily while writing; and he wiped his forehead standing up again. When his wife left him, he looked after her with a strange fear in his eyes, and, after a moment, followed as softly as he could, and tried to see through the half-drawn *portiera*.

"Are you there, Leo?" said his wife's voice inside. "Come in, if you like."

She was tying on her bonnet at the glass, and there was a mocking smile on her lip. "It is well that I gave it to the Sor Chiara!" she thought. "I will give her this to-day. He will search for them!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

MADAME ELISE.

Count Francesco Alinori followed the custom of his predecessors in letting rooms and apartments in his palace, when opportunity offered. This was seldom, as they let only to foreigners, and but few foreigners cared to stay in Ombra for more than a day or two. It was such a dead place, they said.

It had, however, the advantage of being a cheap place, and it was for this reason that our American vice-consul (called by the Ombriani, Signor Ailderry) and his wife came there one summer a year or two after the marriage of Don Leonardo Alinori with the Signorina Beatrice; that is, the vice-consul brought his wife there, and left her, and when she was ready to go home he came again to escort her. He could not leave the office so long, and, besides, he frankly hated the country. Possibly, he was willing to be relieved for a while from attendance on his wife, who was rather exigent. He certainly made no difficulty about other men serving her, perhaps because he knew that he could trust her.

For he could trust her. With a quenchless thirst for admiration, Madame Elise, as our Ann Eliza insisted on being called, never gave any man reason to believe that she would accept anything but his respectful homage; but homage was sweet to her from whatever source it came. If a dog paused to look at her, she would smile on him.

Of course she could have had a larger field for her operations almost anywhere else, and she longed to go to some fashionable summer resort; but they were not rich enough. Nine-tenths of their income went for nine months' modest gayeties in Venice. The other three months she spent in Ombra, wearing out her old clothes and taking care of her beauty.

Moreover she found her intimacy with the Alinori a social advantage. Their family was an old one, and their connections good.

The dull old town, for its own part, found this visitor charming, and flattered her to her heart's content. She was so bright, so affable, so brilliantly beautiful, so harmlessly haughty at times, just enough to make her favors of value, that she quite lighted up the place. When she had been there three summers in succession, they considered her a citizen, and her withdrawal would have been looked upon as a calamity.

She showed herself in the piazza at least once every day, and gave even the charcoal men an opportunity to admire her bright eyes and rosy cheeks. She went down to the railway station when the afternoon trains to and from Rome crossed each other there, and walked up and down the platform, so as not to be wanting in case some friend should come or pass by. She made acquaintance with the principal families in Ombra; and though some were scarcely on speaking terms with each other, she made them all come to her for afternoon tea, and so resolutely assumed that they were the best of friends, that they were obliged to smile at each other over their cups of the detestable herb which turned their unaccustomed stomachs upside down.

The old countess was quite swept off her feet by

this beautiful American, who kissed her hand and begged permission to kiss her cheek; who made bouquets of flowers for the altar of her chapel, gave her wax candles for her beloved *cappuccini*, and held out delusive hopes that she might one day embrace Catholicism; made her profound courtesies, which pleased the old lady; called her "contessa" in season and out of season, asked her advice, deferred to her, and did as she pleased.

Nina and Madama Beatrice were the only persons who never yielded to her charm, but rather hated her for it; and it must be admitted that she gave them ample reason, for she treated Nina as a servant, and Madama Beatrice as an old woman.

The old countess died the third summer after Ann Eliza's residence in her family; and the winter following, her lodger had a mass said "for the repose of the soul of my dear friend, the Signora Contessa Alinori." The function took place in San Marco, at the altar of the Madonna, and all of Madame Elise's acquaintances were invited to assist.

The young Countess Elena, Francesco's wife, followed his grandmother in a year, making but little difference to any one in the house but her husband and the servant who attended on her. She had long been an invalid, and was never seen outside of her chamber. Giovanni's wife had gone to live with one of her daughters. Of the Alinori there were left only Don Leonardo and his wife, and the count and his young son. If only that tenacious old Giovanni Giorgini would die, Beatrice would be mistress of Palazzo Alinori till the majority of this little Cesare.

But Giovanni clung to life; and his wife, who looked like a witch, was supposed to have discovered some philter.

When the Countess Elena died, Beatrice had a few days of such agony as threatened to spur her to some desperate deed. After almost ten years of marriage she seemed no nearer her object in marrying than before. Her threats and her blandishments had alike failed. Don Leonardo persisted that he had not witnessed her mother's marriage.

"If I had not married him, perhaps after all I might have married Checco," she thought. "And now Leo will not die any more than Giovanni will."

On Madame Elise she kept a close watch.

"What do you care what she does?" her husband asked irritably one day when Nina had slipped into their *salon* a moment to report that madame and the count were going out riding, and Ventura had gone for the horses.

Beatrice turned her dark eyes on her husband with a glance that made him shrink.

"It is, perhaps, very trifling," she said slowly, after a pause. "But it is all the amusement I have. You can occupy your mind with your gout, your lame back, your indigestion, your fear of death, your one visitor, the barber, your mass in the morning, where you sit and curse between your prayers, your miserable confessions, when your only regret is that you can sin no more—all these amuse you. But I, who am, unfortunately, young and healthy, should go mad, forever shut up in this room with you, if I did not seize upon every trivial interest to vary the monotony."

She spoke with her eyes fixed on the old man opposite her, who seemed to wither away as he listened. He sank further back into his chair, drooped, and remained silent.

She continued looking at him a moment longer, then rose and left the room.

He groaned as he looked after her. He adored her, hated her, was afraid of her, and wanted her forever in his sight. Above all, he was jealous of her. He had not watched ten years for nothing, and she had almost scorned to guard herself. He knew where she and her heart went. The world of Sanzio considered her a devoted and affectionate wife. Not a stain rested on her name. It was thought, indeed, that she sacrificed herself too much. He knew that she was waiting for him to die, and that if she should will his death, he must die. Only one hold he had upon her: her belief that he could prove her mother's marriage. While she had that idea, and he could keep her in suspense, his life would be precious to her. He smiled with an ugly, mirthless contortion of the mouth, thinking how she took care of him. If she loved him, she could do no more.

Yes, it was a sweet revenge, when he saw her toss her proud head at him, to know that she believed him able to place a coronet on her brow, and that he would not.

Of course he must tell the truth to some one before he died. He was afraid of death, mortally afraid. He shrank from the great darkness outside of life, and the shadowy figures which might confront him there. There was a certain paper — he glanced suspiciously about him in only thinking of it — which he had written one day when he was very sick, and feared to die. He had been at the point of telling her all that day. If Francesco had not come into the chamber, he would have told her. Francesco always kept close watch when he was sick.

Rising from his own arm-chair, Don Leonardo went

to seat himself in one of the high-backed satin ones; and, sitting there, dropped his arms down at either side. He seemed to be resting himself by a change of position, and his movement was quite natural. But the fingers at the side of the wall were feeling about the cushion of the chair. After a moment's vain search, his face expressed terror. His eyes grew wild, and his jaw dropped. Then a sigh of relief, that was almost a groan, passed his lips. He had felt a stiff corner of folded paper in the wool stuffing of the cushion. Re-assured, he rose with difficulty, and went back to his own chair.

Beatrice had gone to the private stair, entered a dark corridor, and opened a little wooden slide in the wall. Bending her head, she looked down into the great *salon*, where Madame Elise had been giving tea to a dozen ladies and gentlemen.

The hostess wore an equestrian habit of dark blue, and on the sofa beside her was a little blue velvet square *beretta* of ecclesiastical shape, with an aigrette of dark blue and green pen-feathers at the left temple. She was as brilliant as a mosaic.

The ladies were taking leave, professing themselves much refreshed by their cup of tea. One had dexterously poured hers out the window while looking to see the horses they had heard led up, and another had bent to admire a large vase of flowers, and contributed the contents of her tea-cup to their maintenance.

Count Alinori, with a quivering face, but heroic gallantry, had swallowed every drop of his.

A slight bitter smile passed over the face that watched them through the wall. Beatrice had already received the count's confidences on the subject of his tea.

"*Per Bacco!*" he had said. "Sometimes I am

afraid that I cannot keep it down, *con rispetto.* What do people mean by insisting on your drinking medicine, when you are well? I told her that I never drink tea, and do not like it; and she said that I must learn."

It was a graceful scene below; for the company were gay and well bred, and their delicate summer dresses made a pleasant contrast to the room — a stiff, splendid *salon*, with mythological subjects painted in dark hues on the walls and ceiling, great gilded chairs and sofas cushioned with crimson brocade, a few cabinets and tables, and a brick floor. Two western windows, full of sunshine, only half lighted this room, the walls were so thick, and the brocade curtains so voluminous.

Ventura came from the piazza with the afternoon mail as the last visitor left.

"Letters from home!" Madame exclaimed. "And letters from mamma and Francis. Now I shall know when Atalanta is coming. But I can read them in the saddle, and we are already late."

There was a little gathering to see the *signori* mount — a few children, a capuchin monk leaning on his cane and talking to an old woman, and a few heads half visible in windows. Nina peeped from behind a *persiana*, Ventura stood in the *portone*, and Beatrice leaned openly from her *salon* window. There were tears in her eyes. How she missed everything! She would have liked to ride, and had never mounted anything but a donkey. She imagined her own superb figure in a habit, and the plumes of a hat tossing over her forehead.

"I should be as beautiful as that girl," she muttered. "Oh! this is my last St. Martin's summer of beauty, and it is lost! I cannot bear it!"

She shut the window in a passion, and went down to the deserted *salon*, planting herself before a long mirror there.

The figure that it reflected might well have been called the Indian summer of a perfect beauty. Beatrice was now forty years of age, superb in figure, and richly blooming in face. She thrust her loose sleeves back above the elbow, and looked at the soft full snow of her arms. At least, Francesco knew that they were beautiful; but was that enough? There were times when her love for him lifted itself from her like a fever, and left her cold. Thirty-six years of a love so unselfish that she would have sacrificed herself in any way to please him! There had been moments of happiness when she had believed that he loved her, when, perhaps, he had loved no one else better: but the second thought had always been disenchanting. It was no longer enough that he should accept her devotion with a light complacency.

"How well diamonds would look on them!" she said, holding up her arms, and crossing them above her head.

In the mirror she seemed scarcely a reflection, but a picture, as she stood motionless. All the dark rich colors of the room blended indistinctly behind her for a background, her own dark dress melting into them; and from this, with only a hint of the beautiful curves of her figure, her bright face shone star-like, and her white arms caught the light.

Madame Elise and her escort rode through the silent streets, the sound of their horses' hoofs calling the inmates of the houses to their windows. Reaching the piazza, things were a little better. All the gentlemen of the town were either seen or seeing. Here were the offices of the city government, and the societies; and their windows were all open.

Mrs. Elder recollected that she wanted some postage-stamps; and, the moment she stopped, her horse was surrounded. All the gentlemen came to pay their respects to her. When she pursued her way out the Porta del Sole to the country, all the town went in that direction for an evening walk.

"Now I can read my letters!" she said, with a careful eye not to outstrip her retinue.

Count Alinori watched her as she read. He was an unscrupulous admirer of female beauty: yet, after the first season of enthusiasm, hers had left him cold. She was to him only an image of a woman, passionless and unsympathetic, unless her vanity were a passion. Yet it was a pleasure to watch her.

"Poor mamma!" she said, folding the first letter. "She wants so much to see me!" Something of real feeling showed in her face. "Now for mamma Elder." She opened a second letter.

Mrs. Elder had come to Europe the autumn before, accompanied by Atalanta Martin, and after spending the winter in Venice, with her son and his wife, had taken her niece to the Tyrol. She was to return to America, and Atalanta would join Mrs. Ann Eliza at Ombra. In another year the doctor and his wife would come to Europe, make a short sight-seeing tour, and take their daughter home.

"Mamma Elder has set out for Paris," the lady said; "and Atalanta is on her way here with my husband. They will arrive to-morrow afternoon."

As she opened the third letter, a photograph fell out of it. She glanced at it, and held it out to her companion.

"Would you like to see it?"

The count took it with some eagerness. He remembered Doctor Martin perfectly; and in the last

year or two he had heard a good deal about the family from his tenant, who was never weary of the subject. They were very rich, and had a beautiful country-place quite like an Italian villa. A railroad had been laid across their land, and there was a station only half a mile from his house, and a little village had gone right up there. The family was a very superior one, she assured him. James was going to be a doctor, and would settle in Southport. Atalanta had spent a winter in Washington, and been greatly admired. Atalanta ought to be a President's wife.

A reverence for the Martin family had been embedded in the early strata of Ann Eliza's life, and no later-seen grandeur had been able to displace it.

The count had listened with some amusement to these praises, saying to himself that the famous Atalanta probably resembled her friend, through whose elegance the rustic background sometimes peeped forth. He had seen, too, an early ambrotype of the girl, taken in her hunting dress, with a rifle slung behind her shoulder; and though the picture was a striking one, it had not captivated him. His mother had innocently expressed his own idea concerning it.

"Oh! Is this a descendant of one of the original inhabitants?" the old countess had asked with great interest.

The question had made him laugh at the time, though Ann Eliza had very summarily enlightened the old lady concerning American society. It rankled somewhat in the young woman's mind that she herself had been at first taken by the countess as a descendant of the aborigines.

This picture was a very different one, though the face in both was so absolutely the same that it was

difficult to believe one to represent a girl of fourteen, and the other a young woman of twenty-three. Atalanta was seated in a sleigh holding the reins of a span of horses. But only her figure, in a nest of furs, and the hand that held the reins, were visible. A band of sables bound her forehead like a crown, and the same rich fur was drawn closely around her throat. She looked directly into his eyes, and smiled. It was an inexpressibly innocent and joyous face.

The count glanced at his companion, and found her engrossed in her letter. He looked back at the picture in his hand, and stealthily raised his hat to the smiling face.

It inspired him with a feeling of tenderness.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ATALANTA.

The next day Mrs. Elder went down to the railway station to meet her husband and cousin. She had hired a passable carriage from the one livery stable of Ombra, and Count Alinori accompanied her on horseback. The Alinori had no carriage.

Even in that moment of somewhat excited expectation, Ann Eliza noticed that her escort was looking unusually well. His figure was noble and soldierly, and there was something in his whole appearance which the lady defined to herself as romantic. Mrs. Elder had a very decided way of describing the persons she met, with a single word.

Beatrice watched them as they disappeared down the street. She was thinking, "The girl who comes is but twenty-three, and I am thirty-nine!"

When they disappeared, she went down to see the chamber that Nina had prepared, under her master's orders, for their visitor. For, though nominally the mistress of the house, Beatrice entered very little into its management, careful not to assume a position which she might one day be obliged to vacate.

The chamber selected was that which had been occupied by the Countess Elena. At her death, everything had been changed. Instead of a dark paper and gloomy hangings, the room was now lined with pale blue and furnished with rose and blue cretonne. Nothing could have been more charmingly gay and

fresh. Two large windows where gray *persiane* were now struggling to keep out the too bright sunshine looked into the street, and a long window opened on a terrace built eastward on the roof of an adjoining wing of the palace. Since morning this terrace had been set round with flowering plants, the finest from the garden.

Beatrice reddened at sight of these flowers. She had seen the count in the garden, going about among the plants with Giovanni, their gardener and factotum, and had thought nothing of it. He always went into the garden in the morning.

When had so much pains been taken for a visitor? So much had not been done for Madame Elise. If this American girl had been a princess he could not have done more.

She stood in the open window and looked out at the low flowery wall over which the campagna with its circling mountains was visible, but without seeing them. She was saying to herself: "Her father gave me a jewel when another would have given me some servant's gift; and he remembered and sent me presents, and wrote to me as if I were a gentleman's daughter, destined for something better than servitude. My benefactress was a friend of his. But for them where should I be now?"

She had always remembered Doctor Martin with a passionate gratitude and devotion. The others were a dim recollection of her childhood; and, besides, a sensitive instinct told her that, while the ladies had been kind, there was a certain self-complacency and vain-glory in their kindness to her. It was quite sure that they had recounted all the circumstances of their charity. But he — he had thought only of giving her a pleasure.

The vision of that gentleman came up clearly before her. She saw the kind lingering glance he had given her, not knowing who she was. She would never forget the rapture that had thrilled her heart when a sealed package was opened to show a tiny velvet box, and in the box a golden circlet set with the soft blue of a turquoise.

"I will be kind to her," said Beatrice, and sighed as she returned to the chamber.

Here again the tasteful master of the house had left his mark. A crucifix by the bedside was almost covered with a veil of passion flowers; there was a spray of red roses over the glass, and a rare old porcelain cup had been brought from one of the *salons* to hold a *unique* bouquet. A young slip of an olive-tree in the garden had blossomed that year for the first time; and all its virgin wealth of small creamy flowers had been gathered to surround a single pale blush rose, scarcely open yet. The group meant love and peace, and had a suggestion of infantile freshness and innocence.

Beatrice read the message. She bent and breathed the fragrance of the rose. A momentary faintness came over her; then she laughed with a slight scorn. "I have had the first of the rose and the love!" she said, and yet was conscious of no bitterness toward the new-comer, but rather of a tender eagerness to meet her. Her eagerness had grown stronger since she spoke the night before with Alinori.

Some new-born feelings are like flowers in the spring, the one growing after silence is broken, as the other when it has broken the sod.

That momentary faintness had been the shock of change, and not of loss and anguish; and her first thought was a wish that she also could do something

for Atalanta. She would have liked to offer something all her own. From childhood that had seemed to her enviable — to be able to offer something all one's own.

She looked through her small possessions: gifts of strangers, she said to herself, of Mrs. Nelson, and of Don Leonardo, who was worse than a stranger. Though grateful to Mrs. Nelson, she would have handed over all her gifts, had she been able, to some one poorer than herself, and felt no pain in parting with them. They were the gifts of charity, and might be transferred as charity.

But the turquoise ring was the proof of a personal sympathy, and a thing to be cherished forever.

There was only one thing more — the strings of pearls that had been her grandmother's and her mother's. They were small and somewhat discolored, but had yet a soft lustre about them, and they were all her own.

She took them from their shabby old case, and twisted them about her arm. Yes, they were still worth giving. She ran downstairs, and laid them against the blue gauze which draped the toilet-glass. The effect was lovely.

Catching off the hard blue ribbons that bound it back, she put her pearls in their place.

Her face, which usually expressed pride and reserve, was very sweet as she stood there, looking at the effect of her work, and tightening the blue folds underneath their milky band. She would have been lavishly generous to affection. She had shown it in her wish to possess the Sanzio estates only that she might give them to Francesco Alinori, no one to know.

The tenants received at Palazzo Alinori had always

been distinct from the family, even when they had no separate service; but Mrs. Elder had been admitted to their table, and, from long familiarity, lived in the house with the ease of a mistress. Beatrice kept herself in the background, and had let the lady come and go and command as she would. But to-day she meant to show that she was mistress, and to receive Dr. Martin's daughter with all honor.

"What have you put on that dress for?" her husband asked crossly as she came out of her bedroom.

It was a beautiful dress of black lace and crimson ribbons, the only pretty dress she had; and she had fastened a dark red rose in her hair. It was a rose as dark as a carbuncle, and so fragrant that it left a waft of sweetness on the air wherever she went.

"Do I look well?" she asked, lightly, standing before him.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I have dressed to do honor to the daughter of a benefactor," she said. "And now I am going down to watch for the train she comes in. It is almost due. It is a festal day for me."

She took an opera-glass, and went down to the terrace.

A long yellow road led straight from the town to the station-house in the plain, about half a mile from the gate. The road was sparsely dotted with pedestrians and carriages. She could see Mrs. Elder's carriage and the count's saddle-horse in the station yard, and the lady and gentleman at the other side, walking up and down the platform.

Beatrice recollected the surging passion of jealousy which this woman had wakened in her at her first coming, four years before. It was all over now. She could

even laugh at it. Mrs. Elder could command, but she could not fascinate. She had the power of a strong will and a beautiful face; but men, while admiring and obeying her, seldom felt the charm of loving tenderness or irresistible attraction toward her.

But was this the sole reason of her calm in seeing them together?

"I am not the same woman," she thought. "Can it be that I am growing old? I am tired of loving! I am tired of this narrow, monotonous life. I have thrown myself away, and let a foolish passion make me forget my rights and my ambitions. Perhaps, if I had my own, or some assurance of success, my life would come back again. I could be happy again, and miserable again, instead of feeling so dull."

Presently, in a gorge between two mountains, which seemed to have shut off the plain northward, appeared a feather of white smoke. It floated nearer, over the green shrubbery, now in sight, and then lost again; and then the back of the long, jointed creature grew visible behind the feather, only a black, crawling line above the low, green *vigne* and the yellow wheat. A hard, whirring sound was heard, borne on the wings of the light *libeccio;* and a long train of cars, as romantically fabulous an object in such a scene as any fire-eyed dragon of the past, came into full sight across the plain.

The count and Mrs. Elder paused in their walk at the first distant rolling sound that caught their ears; and, in a few minutes, the engine, all alive, came clamping around a curve, and headed down toward them, followed by the rough whir of the many rolling wheels, and slackened up at the platform.

The carriage doors were all thrown open, with a cry of "Ten minutes!" along the line: the royal

carabinieri, in their handsome uniforms, walked about, quietly observant and serious; a hundred curious faces looked out, many admiring glances falling on the lady on the platform, to her serene contentment. Only a few persons descended, Francis Elder appearing from one of the first carriages that had passed his wife by.

"Oh! there they are!" she said, and hastened up the platform.

The vice-consul stood by the carriage step, and held his hand up. A cloud of floating brown gauze was blown out the door, and a young lady stepped down with an astonishing ease and lightness, scarcely touching the hand raised to assist her, and not leaning at all. Then, at a word from her cousin, she turned toward his wife. The dress, a little lifted on the step behind her, allowed it to be seen that she turned on tiptoe, and was by no means settled squarely on her feet.

A repressed excitement betrayed itself in the count's usually self-contained face. "She is not Atalanta, but Alata!" he thought: and as they approached, he drew aside, and let the friends meet each other undisturbed. His gaze was fixed upon the young stranger.

She was dressed all in brown, and the sheeny gauze of her veil flowed about her head and shoulders. The sombre color suited her pearly complexion, and the auburn hair, which held the same shadows. There was a peculiar softness in her face, for all its deep and brilliant colors. The hair shaded down to a pale gold on the temples, so that one could scarcely distinguish where it stopped; the eyebrows, deep brown along the central line, softened at the edges; and the black eyes were velvety, and beautifully veiled by the

long brown lashes through which their beams shot harmlessly.

She looked the happy girl she was, and spirit-free. She met her cousin's wife with an affectionate cordiality of expression, and a warm hand-clasp, but did not kiss her. She was, apparently, not a gushing creature. There was even a hint of gentle stateliness, unconscious and evanescent, in her air.

Mrs. Elder, quite aware that she was playing a prominent part before a good many spectators, summoned Count Alinori, and presented him to her cousin.

"Oh!" murmured Atalanta, with brightening eyes. She had already observed him, and thought, "What a noble-looking gentleman!"

"I am the bearer of a message to you," she said, when he had bowed silently before her. "My father, Doctor Martin, wished me to recall him to your recollection, and present his compliments. He has always remembered with pleasure his visit to Villa Alinori; and has preserved an ambrotype which he begged of you there." She was glad that she had not offered her hand, when he bowed a second time.

"I remember the Signor Professore perfectly," he said. "We were all impressed by him. And of course we all have in grateful memory the kind attentions shown to one who has since become a member of our family."

"Beatrice!" said Atalanta. "Oh! take me to her."

"You would scarcely recognize me from my picture," the count said with a smile.

"I do not know yet," she answered, and took her cousin's arm to go to the carriage.

Mrs. Elder gave her escort a glance of surprise, quickly averted. "I would not have believed that he could look so bashful!" she thought.

And Atalanta was thinking, as she followed them, "Oh! the beautiful manner, as father said."

Where was the charm? In its deference? In something that seemed almost tender? In a seriousness which was not grave, but showed a graceful gayety lurking beneath?

"The title of *cavaliere* would suit him best," she thought, as she saw him vault lightly into the saddle. "Count means nothing. He looks soldierly with that large, curled mustache. But the eyes — yes, they are the eyes of the picture!"

Mrs. Elder, who never waived any dignity which she could claim, took the right-hand place in the carriage, and the *cavaliere* was consequently at Atalanta's side. She smilingly watched the coquetries of his restive horse, and the firm hand that kept them within bounds.

"How I like to enter a walled city!" she said. "It is so picturesque and mediæval. I half expect now to see the Countess Matilde with Hildebrand coming out from under the arch there."

"You might imagine yourself the Countess Matilde, with Count Alinori for the pope," Mrs. Elder remarked.

"She would have to wear a high conical hat," her cousin said; "and ride on horseback, man-fashion, with spurs on her heels."

They went up a steep hill that led to the upper level; and here the count, touching his hat and bending low, put spurs to his horse, and rode on, to be at the palace door before them. He was standing there, and a man was leading his horse away, when they drew up at the *portone;* and he managed so that it was he who helped the ladies down.

As before, Atalanta needed no help. Scarcely

touching his hand, as a matter of form, she stepped lightly and swiftly past him.

"What beautiful stones!" she said, looking at the great blocks of which the palace was built. "My father told us of them."

She drew off a glove, and laid her warm, white hand flat to the white and crimson *sasso vivo*, a touch that was intimately friendly.

"We thought a great deal of such things when we were building. When the red bricks were brought up for our house, father said, 'Oh, if I could reach those quarries in the Sabines!'"

The vestibule had two wide stairways, one to right and one to left, the one leading to the drawing-rooms of the *piano nobile*, the other to the kitchen on the third floor. The first staircase was continued only inside the door to the state apartment.

At every turn of this drawing-room stair a small dark window in the wall overlooked the approach, and another in the vestibule commanded the *portone*. The Cyclops eye looked from dark passages or closets, and gave the unaccustomed visitor an impression of secrecy and insecurity in the past, if not in the present.

A heavy oaken door thickly studded with nails opened before them when they reached the landing — opened wide, and showed Nina smiling and bending against the wall. They passed a somewhat bare anteroom to a first *salon*, which was the music-room; and beyond, between the curtains of a second *salon*, Madame Beatrice appeared, much to Mrs. Elder's surprise, and not at all to her contentment. That apparition caught the words of welcoming and compliment quite off her lips, and the smile with them.

The mistress of the house stood there, a superb woman, with cheeks as crimson as her ribbons. Her

eyes sought with a bright eagerness the face of Doctor Martin's daughter, and her heart melted at the smile which broke over Atalanta's face at sight of her.

"Oh, don't present me, please!" the girl said, and went to her with a swift, soft grace, "I know her so well!"

Beatrice took one step forward to clasp the extended hands, and kissed Atalanta on both cheeks. Her air was proud and queenly, as she courtesied to the others, and led the way back to the *salon*. Mrs. Elder, very much shorn of her feathers, followed; and the count entered last, breathless with surprise and pleasure at this unhoped-for graciousness. He had prepared himself for war, or, rather, for attack to which he had meant to oppose a passive resistance; and here, instead, was radiant peace! It seemed too good to be true.

"And how handsome Bice is to-day!" he thought, looking at her gratefully.

"I have some tea for you," Beatrice said, leading them into a second *salon*, still holding Atalanta by the hand. "I thought it would refresh you after your long journey."

She took possession of the girl, gave her the prettiest chair, brought her tea, smoothed and folded the gloves that she took off, and carefully lifted her gauzy tissues back out of the cup's way. Nina served the others, and the count entertained Mr. Elder, while Ann Eliza sat in an astonishment that was not far from vexation. For three years she had dispensed tea in this apartment as though it were her own; though, in fact, she paid for only a bedroom. Never once, when she received, had Madama Alinori entered. On this very afternoon, before going out, she had told Nina to have tea ready for them on

their return. And here she found herself all at once a guest in the presence of a very confident-appearing mistress. There was a rather mortifying suspicion that she had, perhaps, taken somewhat too literally their largely hospitable injunction to make the house her own, and do quite as she pleased in it.

It was Beatrice who showed Atalanta to her chamber, and in such a way that no one else went.

"What! Pearls?" exclaimed the girl, when she had admired the terrace, and returned to the toilet.

"I am sorry that they are discolored a little," said Beatrice. "But they look pretty on the blue, do they not? They are my only inheritance. When you go away, I shall throw them into the fire."

Count Alinori was on the stair when Beatrice came out of the chamber. He stopped her, with an air at once kind and embarrassed. "You are beautiful to-day, Bice," he said, "and you have behaved charmingly."

They both stood hesitating a moment; and the pause was eloquent. They had passed each other carelessly many a time, but their carelessness had now another meaning. It meant separation.

"Because I was friendly to that girl?" asked Beatrice, with an affectation of surprise. "Why, of course I should be. Her father was a friend of mine; and my friends have not been so many that I should be indifferent to one of them."

"Why am I so careless of his praise?" she wondered. "Is it true that I am careless? Love is disappointing!" The thought left its shadow rather as a question: Is it disappointing?

Her love had always been expecting unconsciously, without knowing what it looked for. It had always been imperfect. Perhaps she had found that such

expectation is a delusion. But she wondered at herself.

For the count, he thought no more of Beatrice when he had turned away. "How light and well poised she is!" he was thinking. "She has grown bright and clear in the woods, as a jewel does in the earth. What soft, swift movements, like a wild creature which culture may take as a model! The ladies who study every charm to make it their own will study her movements, and try to imitate them. And what an angelic glance, so kind and so pure! It is a kindness that you fear to touch, lest you should lose it."

There is, perhaps, no man who is capable of noble and enthusiastic feeling whose first religious aspiration is not toward a woman. It is a woman who stands between him and heaven, to help or to hinder; and if she is not his angel, then she cannot be of women all in all to him. She cannot bind him surely to herself alone by being merely his housekeeper or most familiar companion, nor even by being the mother of his children.

Francesco Alinori had lightly called more than one woman angel, because she pleased his fancy; but in Atalanta he was conscious of some higher angel-hood. He could even imagine her beauty fading like a flower that gives place to fruit; and that inward light growing as it faded till it should burst the shell at last, and shine forth in all its splendor.

"I am not worthy of her!" he said, and did not know that in all his life it was the first time that he had ever felt himself unworthy to possess whatever he might wish for; and that there was worth in his humility.

"If only I were young again!" he thought. "If

only I were the boy of the foolish picture she has seen!" And, again, without his knowing it, this strange, passionate wish was half accomplished in the wishing that threw off much of incrusting scepticism, and re-awakened from its long sleep the uncalculating adoration of the boy.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A LESSON.

When the two Americans had dressed for dinner, they went up into the garden.

Atalanta had put on a dress of fine white linen bordered with black velvet, and had swathed her shoulders in a long scarf of green gauze. She always wore gauzes when she could; and this green color, instead of making her look pale, brought out instead a lovely tint of rose in her fair skin. Besides, one never knew when she might blush. Hers was not the pallor which makes one doubt if there be blood in the veins beneath.

Finding some young olive-trees in the garden, she made a little half-wreath of their smoky green leaves, and fastened it to the coiled gold of her hair.

Don Leonardo sat at his window, looking out at her. Their *salon* was on the garden now, and their sleeping-rooms next the street.

Beatrice stood before the window, arranging anew her ribbons, and thinking of their new guest, whom she already loved with that sudden sweet passion that she felt for all who had been kind and sympathetic toward her, with no blot upon their kindness. She had a pathetic, helpless sense of her own bitterness toward everybody else, and a tremulous longing to keep her love for them from every taint. No one could ever turn her heart against them; no one but themselves. No art was cunning enough to poison her mind, if only they kept true.

Had not everything been done to set her against Francesco? And she had known why it was done, and followed every winding of the serpent as it approached her. And how much she had forgiven him! First, for being an Alinori. Then, many a careless lightness toward herself, as a man will do when too sure; and for taking her adoring worship from the first, for other than it was. She had said: He cannot help it. It is his way. It is a man's way. Yet sometimes it had seemed to her so pitiful! She had stood like some serious young priestess with a sacred flame in her hands, offered to her divinity; and he, laughing, had desecrated that sacred spark. And she had forgiven him, and loved on. It was his way. He knew no better.

But now again she asked herself if she had unconsciously ceased to love him. If so, it must be for that very reason: that he knew no better; no better could be expected of him. And she wanted better. That, too, was a revelation to her of herself, come, perhaps, with this breath of outside air, and far-off influences, and the sweet spontaneous affection shown by this girl whom she had never seen before, yet who "knew her so well!"

"She is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen!" Don Leonardo said, looking out.

Beatrice started, and went to the window.

Mrs. Elder was examining some flowering shrub, and Atalanta, standing by her, had stepped on two small stones that gave her a few inches of support, where she stood secure. It was something of the instinct of the goat, which climbs on a wall, or a pile of stones, to rest, instead of staying on the level ground. The balanced lightness of her movements had grown from this childish habit of tiptoe stepping and climb-

ing, when she scarcely passed a tree whose branches she could reach without springing to hang there a moment, or a mossy crag without trying what foothold its splintered sides would give her. As she stood and they looked upward, her head, with its fair profile and shining hair, were against the deep blue sky.

"She has such a slender, elegant figure!" Don Leonardo pursued. "She is like a tall lily that has just blossomed. She sparkles with freshness."

He stole a sidelong look at Beatrice's face as he spoke, and smiled at sight of a frown growing there; and she knew it.

Yet the frown was not for Atalanta's beauty, but for his malignant humor. She knew that he was trying to make her jealous, and would believe her jealous. It angered her to know that he should think her like himself; and the anger touched a nature already galled to an irritable sensibility. She trembled, too, lest he should in some way spoil this ideal friendship of hers, and hated him for touching it.

"Francesco will fall in love with her," Don Leonardo went on. "He is sure to. And they say that she has money."

"It would be a very good match for him," Beatrice said carelessly, turning from the window. "Have you dressed for dinner? Your collar isn't straight." She went to him again, and, with the effort she had always to make when obliged to touch him, set his collar straight, keeping herself at arm's-length. She had never neglected any of those attentions which his decrepitude rendered necessary, though she often relegated them to Nina.

"She would look well in a coronet," Don Leonardo persisted. "Diamonds would become her. We Alinori haven't many; but she can soon have some of the

finest in the world. The Giorgini diamonds flash like steel. Dipped in water, they almost set it on fire."

The last word was scarcely uttered, for Beatrice with a sudden movement lifted her arm, and struck him across the mouth.

"Tigress!" he cried out, catching his false teeth with one hand as they fell, and with the other raising his cane.

"You dare raise your cane to me!" she said, and caught it out of his hand. "You dare talk to me of the Giorgini diamonds! You taunt me with them, slanderer! Perjurer! Galley-slave that ought to be!"

Blazing with rage, she caught him by the collar, and shook him violently; then, still holding him with both hands, looked into his face.

It was deathly pale, and his eyes were half closed. He hung limp in her hands; and his false teeth, having fallen to the floor at this second onset, lay broken at his feet.

"I don't know why I shouldn't throw you out of the window, and crush your miserable bones in the court below!" she whispered with a laugh that was the essence of loathing. "I could!"

She lifted him bodily from his chair with her two hands in his collar; then, as he gurgled out a prayer for mercy, flung him down again, and went to wash her hands disdainfully, and re-arrange her disordered dress.

"Learn not to play with a tigress, you toothless old wolf!" she said, and went out of the room without a glance at him.

He sat panting for a few minutes, then stooped and picked up the fragments of his teeth. Alas! for a full week he would have to remain invisible, and, what was worse, renounce his chief pleasure, abnormal eating.

There was one comfort, however. A faint, cruel smile passed over his ghastly face, as he thought, "That girl will make her suffer the torments of the damned!"

His mind went back to the time when jealousy and hatred had swept every other thought out of his life, when no act that helped him to his end had seemed to him a crime; and, as he recollected those earlier convulsions, some ghost of them returned to shake his wasted, strengthless soul once more, like the subsiding tremor of an earthquake in a down-fallen city.

To what might not Beatrice be driven, caught now in the full zenith of her passions? He hated her with the poisonous hate of age and helplessness. In marrying her for his own pleasure, he had pretended to himself that he made a sort of reparation, and she had undeceived him. For years she had stood over him, an accusing fate. She had turned his foolish fondness to ridicule, had wrung from him the declaration that he knew of no stain on her mother's conduct, and was watching her opportunity to draw the last secret out of his heart. He knew that if she should be alive when he was dying she would stand between him and the priest till his last miserable confession should be made known to her.

But if she could be driven to crime, even as he was! He sat and thought of it.

Beatrice met Nina in the corridor.

"The count is in the dispensary," the girl said, as if incidentally, and slid away without a sound.

The dispensary was near the dining-room and kitchen, and had a window on the garden. The door was an inch or two ajar now, and Beatrice, passing through the dark corridor, paused and looked in.

The count stood somewhat back from the window,

looking out; and the expression of his face made that one spectator hold her breath for a moment.

It was not that it was admiring or loving. She knew that beauty may claim such a glance from any man. Nor was the look impassioned. She had seen that look in his face. But never had she seen such tender delight and reverence in him. His glance touched Atalanta as his hand might have touched a butterfly he was afraid to hurt, delicately and timidly. He watched her as he might have watched an angel grow visible over the head of a sleeping child. She could almost believe that his eyes were humid, though he smiled faintly.

"He has never loved before!" thought Beatrice; and sharp through her heart, transfixing her whole being for the moment, ran the swift conviction. Here was what she had wanted, and missed! Here was the secret of her own indifference and disenchantment. This ethereal, transfigured love was the proof of love's immortality. It had never been hers; and she had consoled herself with the thought that he was not capable of it. And now, before her eyes, it shone in his.

She turned and stole away, feeling herself degraded, robbed of all that makes life of value.

"Ah! why," she thought, "could he not recognize it in me? I stood there for years before him, with my soul uplifted; and he never knew!

"No, I will not weep now; but after dinner! I can cry till midnight; and if my eyes are swollen in the morning, I can say that my head aches."

It had always been so hard for her to get a chance to cry.

"Nina," she said with a commanding air, "carry Don Leonardo his dinner. He cannot come out. His

teeth are broken." And she began to laugh, and went into the dining-room laughing, with her cheeks and eyes so bright that they all smiled at her involuntarily. Never had she looked happier.

The dinner was a rather serious one. Mrs. Elder, calling up her spirits, talked high art; and Mr. Elder allowed it to transpire that he could have told a good deal about diplomacy if he had not been too diplomatic. The count spoke little, but well, on both subjects, not as pretending to be learned in either, but only well informed enough for common purposes. He may have found Mr. Francis Elder's diplomacy most amusingly shallow, and thought that if Mrs. Elder's childish heels had kicked against an ancient arras tapestry when she was admitted to see her mother's visitors, as his had, and her impatient little fists thumped at a carven door with most irreverent rage at its not opening quickly enough, perhaps she would not now find herself so sublimely impressed by an arras or an old carving in wood. But no smile or wandering attention showed that he was not entertained. A glance, a word aside at that figure at his left, an inward listening when he heard her talking across the table to Beatrice, a sunning himself in her happy presence, — that was what the dinner meant to him.

As for Atalanta, she spoke but little, and that chiefly to the mistress of the house; but she listened to the count, who expressed his thoughts in choice and varied language, and with that sonorous softness with which some Italians show the beauty of their mother tongue.

"I am taking a lesson in Italian," she said to him.

"Yes," thought Beatrice; "I am shut out from

everything! There is nothing that I can talk about, even with him!"

In this was the climax of the wrong that she had suffered. She should have been a cultivated woman, and she was not. She had read but little. There were few books in the house. She had never been outside of Ombra since the day she entered the town an infant, except for that one stolen visit to her own palace. Her life had turned dizzily in one small grinding circle.

"I wonder that it did not kill me long ago," she thought, realizing now how small it had been, from these glimpses of the easy outside lives that others led.

After dinner, Mrs. Elder proposed that they should go to Atalanta's terrace, and herself invited the gentlemen to pass through the chamber. The count laughingly declared that a cavalier never should reach a lady's balcony or terrace except at the risk of life or limb; and after the others had been there a few minutes they saw him coming to them over the curved roof-tiles, and letting himself down the intervening story by projections in the wall. He alighted gayly, with a youthful leap, scarcely to be expected of his somewhat stately figure.

"I shall not let you go back that way," Atalanta said, "though I should like to go myself. It is many years since I have walked on the roof of a house."

Mrs. Elder had watched their host's progress with a succession of faint screams. She always did what she conceived a fine lady should do.

"You have waked, not the sleeping lion, but the sleeping cat, in my cousin's soul," she said. "Pray tell her that if one of those tiles rolls, they all roll. I shall have no more peace if you are going to encourage such perilous adventures."

They looked at the stars and found their names; and, after half an hour, the gentlemen withdrew. But as the count passed to his chamber, Beatrice beckoned him through an open door.

He entered the dim *salon*, with an impatient, "Now for it!" in his mind. Of course she was going to make a scene!

"I have something to tell you, and I beg you not to reply," she said coldly. "I was but a child, Francesco Alinori, when I first began to adore you. Situated as I was then and afterward, it was not strange that I should have loved you without bounds. I repent. If I could blot out the past by suffering any torture, I would welcome suffering. I hate myself; but I do not hate you. I am simply indifferent. I love you no longer. Never forget that for an instant. I love you no longer!"

She was gone, leaving him speechless.

"I only hope that she tells the truth," he muttered. "Beatrice is proud. I hope that she isn't going to be sly."

An undefined alarm took possession of him. If Beatrice was no longer interested in him, it was because some other person or thing interested her more. And yet, poor Bice! "I hope it is true," he said.

Beatrice went to Atalanta's chamber, and, finding her there alone, asked permission to take her hair down and brush it out for her.

"It is such splendid hair!" she said, as she unbraided the tightly woven strands. "The olive-leaves suited it like smoke to fire. Only the fire is like sunset on a cloud in fine gold."

It was the first time that she had ever entertained any one in the character of her own guest, and the first

time that she had ever been affectionately intimate with any lady; and the almost stolen interview had a lover-like charm.

"You seem already the most intimate friend I have in Europe," Atalanta said, in bidding her good-night; and they kissed each other.

As Beatrice went to her own apartment, she met the count coming out. "Leonardo is unwell," he said. "I think he has some fever."

She smiled.

"What has happened to him? He was well enough till he broke his teeth."

"But he ran against a door, and it gave him a shock," the count said.

She flashed a keen glance at him. It was evident that this explanation had been given him, and that he had believed it.

"Don't be alarmed," she said carelessly. "'A cracked vase never breaks.'"

"But, Bice, he is old," was the reproachful comment; and something of the admiration that her laughing malice always had provoked in him, showed in his eyes.

"Dear me!" she said, turning away. "Do I not know it? He has been old ever since I first knew him."

"It is true. She is indifferent to me!" he thought, as she disappeared. "I am glad of it!"

He sighed, nevertheless, in saying again, "Poor Bice!"

CHAPTER XXX.

A RED CHAIR.

Two months of oppressively hot weather followed. It was impossible to go out by day; but they spent half the night in the open air.

Three times a week the whole town gathered in the piazza to hear the band play; and on those occasions Mrs. Elder held a reception, and ate ices while chatting with her admirers, or listening to the music.

Chairs were brought to the open vestibule of a church directly opposite the music stand, and the ladies were royally entertained.

Atalanta made excursions through the crowd, on the count's arm, or sat apart with him and watched the scene. It was a sufficiently democratic, or, at least, harmonious one, all ranks mingling without disdain on the one side or brutality on the other.

"I have never seen a crowd where the people were so gentle," Atalanta said to her escort, one evening. "In America we get elbowed and pushed, and they say that an English crowd is rude. But here, they always make way pleasantly."

"Our people are civil," the count said, "to those who are civil to them. I think that the Signor Professor, your father, liked Italians."

"Yes; but he always said that he could not understand them. You might know a person, he said, who was all that was bad and disagreeable, apparently. And then, in certain circumstances, to your

surprise, he would show some generous impulse, or some delicacy of feeling which would make it impossible to hate him."

"Yes," said the gentleman, smiling; "and then you might know some person whom you would think everything that is admirable and amiable, and suddenly he would display characteristics which would make it impossible to love him."

"Father did not say that. And from what I have seen of Italians, I should think that there is always something to love in them."

It was to the credit of Count Alinori that he took this declaration as simply as it was meant, though he was amused by its ingenuousness.

The family did not meet in the day till their noon breakfast; and after that, the count used to read to the ladies, or at least to Atalanta, from the Italian poets.

In September, the vice-consul returned to the duties of his office, rejoicing. The life of Ombra bored him. He could not understand how his wife and cousin found it so pleasant.

"I find it delicious," Atalanta declared. "Everybody seems to enjoy life so, and to need so little."

"But what can you find to do?" he asked.

"Fold my hands!" she replied, suiting the action to the word. "I am become like one of Tennyson's Lotos-Eaters. Truly, Frank, I could sit contented all day long with my hands folded."

"If Count Alinori were reading poetry to you," her cousin said, somewhat significantly.

"Yes; perhaps it is his reading which makes idleness so pleasant. My mind is busy with the thoughts and scenes he reads. It is delightful to be read to."

Mrs. Elder stepped on her husband's foot, and

gave him a shake of the head behind Atalanta's shoulder.

"Don't talk to her in that way," she said to him when they were alone. "Don't wake her up! It would frighten her. She is in the outer ring of the whirlpool. Let her glide softly."

"You wish her to be ingulfed, then?"

"Certainly," replied Eliza Ann, with emphasis. "They are in love with each other, and he is excellent. Then she will be Countess Alinori, which is something for her, and an advantage to us. Lastly, she will be Countess Alinori-Giorgini, which is much for her and for us. She can then live in the capital, and go to court and present me. You may end with being an ambassador."

Francis Elder looked at his wife with admiration.

"What a head you have got!" he exclaimed.

Atalanta had no conception of what love is. She had been too happy to have ever felt that vacuum of the heart which often leads to a premature, mistaken affection. Breathing from her birth an atmosphere of love and freedom, taught to confide everything at home, she had never felt the need of pouring out her heart to any new friend. She was not of an impassioned nature; or, rather, passion had never been formed in her; for passion presupposes repression, and she had never been repressed. If she knew that there were silences in her nature, she was not as yet aware of prohibitions.

As the summer passed, and the light chill of autumn began, she grew happier every day, without asking or knowing why, or dreaming of any mystery in herself. That a spirit had stolen in, which gave a charm unknown before to nature, art, life, even to death, she could not know. She felt the change, indeed, but

thought that it was outside of her. It was some charm of Italy. It was because it was an enchanted country. The bird-song was no longer a mere note of music on the air. She would gaze into a rose as if it held some mystic message for her. The whole universe began to present itself as an enigma which one word would solve, if but that word could be found. All things became parts of a whole moving in harmony, and almost audible music; and fine threads stretched trembling from every flower to every star. She grew somewhat serious, and even felt oppressed at times; but it was with an excess of happiness.

"Why do some of the jasmine flowers have six petals, while the most of them have only five?" she asked the count one day at sunset, when they had gone up into the garden.

"Perhaps the six-petalled ones are happier than the others," he said.

"Then I must have a six-petalled one," she said; "for I am almost too happy."

He found her one on the tree they had paused to look at, and she went on beside him, her eyes studiously fixed upon the fragrant, waxen star. "How the world unfolds as one grows older!" she said softly. "Children take things so carelessly. It seems to me that I never saw but the surface of life till now. I was a child till I came to Italy, to Ombra. Is it the air of your beautiful country which stimulates the intelligence?"

The count, trembling like a school-boy in his first love, was terrified lest some word of his might alarm her.

"It might suggest some new thought to you," he said, giving only one glance aside at her.

"Maybe," she went on quietly, still looking at the

flower, "what we think is a difference in our surroundings is a difference in ourselves. Maybe our own soul's unfolding seems the unfolding of the universe. My father says that one cannot learn a new language without getting a new idea of life."

"I have always thought," the count said, "that you can never understand a people till you can speak their language."

"We used to try the birds so," she said with a quick smile. "We could really talk a little with the birds. We made the same sounds, and little by little got to know what some of them meant."

"We imitate them with a whistle, but I don't think that we are on any more friendly terms with them on that account."

"Oh! but that is deceiving," said Atalanta gravely. "Of course no good ever comes of deception. It murders good will."

"You would never forgive a deception?"

"Forgive in one sense, yes," she said. "But you cannot revive what is dead."

"We must persuade you to speak Italian a good deal, so that you may not wish to leave us," the count said lightly.

Atalanta remained thoughtful for a little while; then she said, "I wish that Florida were Italy!"

"You will not remain all winter in Venice?" he asked, after studying a moment over this wish.

"Only till my father and mother come. Then we shall visit other cities. I hope that you will stay in Venice till they come."

"Most probably," he replied.

It was understood that the count was to escort the two ladies to Venice.

The first of October they went out to the villa, all

but Beatrice and her husband. Don Leonardo had wished to go. He had a sort of terror of being left alone with Beatrice. But she refused.

"Here we have our own apartment, and are independent," she said to him. "There we should be guests. And don't you see that they do not want us? Propriety requires that we should be invited; but it also requires that we decline the invitation. The house there will be full without us. Besides, I don't care to leave the apartment here to be searched by Nina every time she comes in."

Don Leonardo turned his head with a startled look at this last remark, and glanced toward the window. Beatrice, who was watching his face to see how he would take her refusal, observed this sudden change of expression, and that his eyes rested on a crimson chair near the window. It was one of two high-backed satin chairs, the most elegant pieces of furniture in their *salon*, and the only articles that he took any interest in. But these he preserved with an extraordinary care. One of them had a piece broken off the lion's claw of the foot, and that fragment he kept in his writing-desk, and had refused to let her have it glued on again. "It would break worse than ever," he insisted. Beatrice was sometimes amused to fancy that he did not like to have her touch this chair of the broken claw.

The invitation was given, and declined. It was even urged a little. The count was afraid that he might seem not to want them.

"The Signorina likes you so much, Bice," he said. "And Cesare wants to see you."

Little Cesare with his tutor had been all summer at the villa.

"You must console the Signorina Alata," she

said calmly. "And I will drive out some day to see the child. It is impossible to take Leo or to leave him alone. He is too lame to go about, and he is an unpleasant object. Here he is out of sight a great part of the time. There he would be continually about."

He went slowly away from her, feeling that she was really sacrificed. He wished that he could do something for her. He had sometimes thought that when Giovanni Giorgini should die, he would leave everything belonging to the Alinori to Beatrice, at least for her lifetime. The manner of his own succession in Sanzio was a subject he did not like to dwell upon. He had no reason to suspect that there had been any fraud, he had certainly not committed any; but he would not have liked to search deeply into all the circumstances of the case. It was easy to say that Paulo had killed himself in desperation, because he was jealous of the girl who pretended to have been his wife; or, as others said, that he had been killed by the jealous husband of another woman. But the name of Beatrice's mother had never been associated with that of any one but Don Leonardo, and his uncle's marriage with the daughter rendered it almost impossible that there could have been any truth in that story. The whole fabric of his rights in Sanzio rested on the fact of Beatrice Lanciani's lightness. Of that Leonardo alone knew the truth. He was sometimes afraid of Leonardo.

He even feared Beatrice sometimes, and the more since she professed, and indeed showed, a perfect indifference to himself. She had told him more than once that she would like to be mistress in Sanzio only that she might give it all to him. "If I had the proofs in my hand to-day, I would destroy them!" she had said.

But things were different now. He could no longer expect any sacrifice from her, nor wish for one, nor yet accept one if offered.

The question often presented itself to his mind: What is it which occupies Beatrice now? He fancied that she had the air of being engrossed by some thought which she did not express. It surely was not of him she thought, nor yet of Atalanta.

He perceived, too, that his uncle was afraid of her. What did he fear?

"I am sorry that you are not going," Atalanta said to her. "But you will drive out sometimes; and we shall come to see you."

They were gone. Cesare only was left with Beatrice; and he would go out with the farmer that evening, riding his own little donkey. He had come in that morning, and begged permission to stay all day.

When the carriage had driven away from the door, Beatrice led the child to her own apartment. He was a rather slender boy of ten years, with more brain than was good for his body, and but little disposition for boyish sports. The greater part of the year was spent by him at the villa, where Assunta, his old nurse, lived, and his tutor went to stay a part of the time.

"You are really looking very well, Cesare," Beatrice said. "Go and kiss Zio Leo's hand."

Don Leonardo was Zio Leo to the child.

She left the boy with his great-uncle, and went into her own chamber. Her brows were drawn with a slight frown, her face expressed determination.

"Now, or never!" she whispered, looking straight before her, and stood there rapt in profound study.

She was only half aware of an occasional querulous admonition from her husband to the boy. "Cesare, don't touch my foot!" And, "Cesare, don't open the shutter!" But presently a sharper exclamation roused her.

"Cesare, what are you doing there!" Don Leonardo exclaimed, with such violence that she turned to look through the curtain.

The boy had taken an illustrated paper from the table, and gone to seat himself with it, on a footstool pushed up to the crimson chair of the broken foot, which he used as a table. He had looked at the pictures, and was now dreamily drawing his finger-tip along the creases of the cushion visible through the linen cover, and pressing softly at each indentation. Nothing could seem more innocent than this trivial, half-unconscious play, and the child looked up in surprise, to see what he was being reproved for. But Don Leonardo's face was red with excitement. He fumbled for his cane, hobbled across the room, pulled the boy rudely up, and pushed the chair back to the wall, from which it had been drawn out a few inches. Then, muttering, he returned to his place by the window. "You spoil the furniture!" he said, and glanced quickly toward the half-open curtain of his wife's chamber.

She had time to draw back out of sight; but she saw the glance.

"Send Cesare to me if he troubles you," she called out from the other side of her chamber.

The boy appeared between the curtains, his cheeks very red, his eyes tearful; and with a quick impulse of compassion she held out her arms to him. He was nearly as much alone and as unloved as herself.

"Dearest, don't mind," she whispered, and drew

his head to her breast, and kissed him. "What were you doing?"

"Nothing. I never can please Uncle Leo. I only did *so* along the chair; and my hands are clean." He held up a delicate hand, milk-white to the finger-tips.

"Yes; you always please him when you read to him," she said. "You read so well. Don't you want to read to him now?"

The boy hesitated between a momentary resentment and the pleasure of displaying his talent.

She gave him a paper and led him out.

"Cesare will read you the news, Leo," she said, and placed a chair for the child near his uncle.

When she saw that both were interested in the reading, she went up into the garden.

Giacomo was there at work, a pale, nervous-looking man, who seemed older than he was. He seldom talked much, and noticeably avoided Madama Beatrice. Seeing her coming now, he watched stealthily the direction she took, and withdrew in another. She followed him with a little angry toss of the head; and, still covertly watching her, he made a circuit of the garden, and went to place himself directly before Don Leonardo's window. He seemed to know that she would not wish to talk with him there.

Giacomo was that son of Lo Zoppo who was with his father at the laurels of Villa Alinori, the morning before the father was found dead in the road. And it was Giacomo who had accused Sopraciglia of having assassinated his father. Nothing had been proved against the man; and Lo Zoppo's death was soon forgotten by all but his own family. Of that family only Giacomo now remained alive. Sopraciglia had died years since, — as might have been expected, in a

drunken quarrel; and no one had mourned for him, least of all those to whom he had been useful. These human tools so often blister the hand that uses them.

Beatrice had several times sought to question Giacomo concerning his family, and especially concerning his father's death; but he never had anything to tell. He would have seemed to her stupid, but that he showed a quick wit in avoiding her. She had watched to see if he had any intimacy with her husband; but, after having recommended him to the place, Don Leonardo apparently took no further notice of him. And yet it was Don Leonardo who he most feared should see him talking with her.

She passed swiftly along the path, and was beside the man almost before he knew.

"When the barber comes again to Don Leonardo," she said, "I wish to see you. I shall come up here. Do not fail."

The man shrugged his shoulders without speaking to or looking at her.

"When I send you word to bring some *broccoli* in from the villa, you will know," she pursued. "You will come here and wait for me."

He made no reply, and she did not wait for one, but went into the house again.

CHAPTER XXXI.

DIANA.

The villa was beautiful at that season, far more beautiful than when Doctor Martin had visited it twenty-six years before. Everything had been improved, and a careless grace substituted for a slovenly grace.

There was a fine harvest, too, so many grapes that the count declared he had not wood enough to hold the wine they would make.

Atalanta stood with him under the trellis one morning, and watched the *contadini* pass them by with baskets of grapes on their heads, the procession varied now and then by a small gray donkey with panniers.

"It is just what my father described!" she said. "It pleased him so much. I recognize the walnut grove, where a gentleman in a black velvet jacket sat reading his paper. But there should be a serious little girl leaning against this post, and" — she stopped, half laughing, and with a soft blush; for nothing had made a more vivid impression on the doctor's mind than the beautiful youth who had come out to meet him.

"And a slender young man, who is no longer recognizable," finished the count. "Would you dream that he is still here, signorina?"

He took off his hat, drew back a little as if to give her a better view of him, and stretched his arms out

to right and left in a cross. His eyes, dancing with a tender merriment, were fixed upon her face; and there was something almost audacious in his manner. It certainly did not betray any fear of being compared with his former self.

Did he know that the hair he uncovered was the more beautiful for those few silver threads; the noble form, full of health and strength, more fitted to support a woman than the slender stripling's; and that her imagination would find a fascination in the thought that he knew all of life where she was ignorant?

A momentary dashing confidence in his manner seemed to say so.

She looked at him, and could not find an answer for a moment. A certain fear set her trembling before that fulness of vitality which had challenged her attention. Her face turned all a faint rose-color, her eyes were half shrinking and half fascinated.

It was but for a moment; then she turned her glance away.

"You are very like him!" she said quietly.

He bowed, and became his courteous self again. He was impressed. Where had she learned her self-control, and calm dexterity in turning aside from an embarrassing position? She had betrayed agitation, and then moved and answered like a woman of the world, without abruptness of transition, or visible effort. Only the faint blush remained to tell of trouble past, unless it still lurked in the averted eyes.

The burden of recovery was left to him. She stood silent and calm, looking away.

"Do you still hunt?" he asked hastily. "I have seen your picture in a hunting-dress. I cannot offer you wild beasts such as you have shot at home, your

cousin tells me; but we might at least find a rabbit for a mark."

She turned to him brightly. "I should so like to have a rifle in my hands again!"

He called a man to bring out his rifle; and when it was given him, "I am almost afraid to put it in your hands," he said. "I cannot realize that it is safe for you."

"Oh! the pretty rifle!" She took it with a hand that showed familiarity, and commented on its make as a soldier or a hunter might.

A crow came winging lazily across the blue, and alighted on a tree near by, on the lookout for corn. She raised the rifle to her shoulder, and fired.

"*Per Bacco!* you have brought him down!" exclaimed the count. "You are Diana herself!"

She laughed with pleasure. "It was such a delight!" she said. "Fancy the woods so full of deer that you could not go out for a ten minutes' walk without seeing them. There were loup-cerviers and foxes; but they kept more out of sight. The bears and wolves were rare. I never saw but one wolf in the woods; and he was in chase of a deer, and did not see me. But I shot a bear. Oh! how proud I was! Father had the skin dressed, and it hangs up in the hall at home. The bounty money went for two silver chains to hang it up by. It hangs to the two great antlers of a stag that father shot the same year."

She was at Beechlands again. The sound of that rifle had awakened all her sleeping memories to vivid life. Her hands folded together, she looked off into distance, and her eyes filled with tears. Ledge and tree and house, the curtain in the window, the form in the door, the face looking at her, the voice speaking, — they rushed up before her with a painful vividness.

"You are homesick!" said a voice that recalled her, speaking low and with a sort of passion.

"No; but I would like to see them this very moment." She wiped her eyes, and smiled again in sighing.

"But you will see your parents soon. Time passes swiftly."

"I do not wish the time away," she said, "though I shall be so glad when they do come. Mother would never let us wish the time away. She said always that if we are anticipating a pleasure, then we are already enjoying it; and that life is so short, it might be at our death that we would gladly welcome back the most painful hour of our existence if we could be allowed to live through it."

"Does time seem so short to you?" asked the count, avoiding with an Italian's life-and-joy-loving nature the gloomy name of death.

"It seems short when I look back. But looking forward, it stretches far away and out of sight, like that line of mountain road there, that goes on and on, I know, though I cannot see it."

"It seems short to me too, when I look back," the count said, "though I must seem old to you. Do you think me a very old man?"

"Oh, no! you seem only to have arrived at perfection, like my father," she said, with perfect seriousness.

He winced a little. "Your father is somewhat older than I am; but still I am much older than you, child. I am twice your age. You are but twenty-three, and I am forty-six."

He sighed, and gave her a searching look. "You must look on me as passed by. You could have no sympathy with me."

"What! because you are older?" she asked. "Why! father is fifty-six, and I am in perfect sympathy with him. He knows how to sympathize with me better than the boys do. I always tell him everything. Then, it seems to me that after a certain age one grows no older really. The years go on, but the person stops. You have reached the top of the hill, and I am still climbing. I shall soon be there, too. You and my mother are about of the same age. When mother talks of growing old, I always begin to reckon. When she shall be eighty-two years of age, I shall be sixty. We shall be old together. Now we are young together."

"Sixty years old!" she repeated to herself, as if the thought amused her.

She laughed, stepped on to a stone before her, and from that to a higher, and from that to a bar of the trellis, and, catching at the upper bar, swung herself into space.

Enchanted, the count stretched his arms out to catch her if she should fall.

She shook her head at him. "You are not to touch me. Stand aside, and I will jump to the platform."

She swung herself back, and alighted with a bound on the platform, her cheeks deeply blushing.

"I am ashamed of being such a hoiden. But when we are sixty years of age we do not jump or swing any more; and it seems a pity not to improve one's youth. You know, I am something of a savage; and the rifle brought it all back."

Mrs. Elder came out in dainty distress.

"Now, Atalanta, it is not possible that you have been firing off a rifle!"

She had heard the shot with a comment something

like Cardinal Mazarin's "Mademoiselle has shot her husband!" but a glance at the gentleman's radiant face re-assured her.

"Even Diana must keep pace with the times," he said. "Besides, I have no bow and arrows."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE CHAPEL.

Giovanni Giorgini's aged wife had two ideas which engrossed her whole mind: the first was to keep her husband alive as long as possible; and the other was to build a new chapel in their palace. The drawing-rooms and bed-chambers might go to rust and rags. She had little use for them. But the chapel was to be her own monument.

A wall was to be taken down between the old chapel and a second chamber of equal size, the ceilings of both removed to include the two attics in a vaulted roof, and all these new walls to be soberly decorated. Then there would be a narrow outside stairway with a little vestibule, so as to give access to the public on certain occasions, one of which would be the celebration of an annual mass for herself. There was to be a long lance window toward the garden, which would light the altar, and the two windows on the street were to be arched.

The work began the year before Atalanta came to Ombra; and when she went out to the villa, the walls, ceiling, windows, and one half of the pavement of the new chapel were completed. The work had progressed but slowly, because the old lady had insisted that mass should be said there every morning just as though nothing else were going on, moving the altar as occasion required, and keeping the habitable part of the chapel curtained in from damp and

dust. The garden, or new half, of the pavement having been laid, a short pause ensued before the final move, and the taking-up of the old chapel pavement. When this should have been replaced by the pretty tiles that were almost like a marble floor, the work would be completed, and the Signora Maria might fold her hands.

She had already founded a perpetual mass for herself, as we have seen, which could be said in Palazzo Giorgini or the Capucin church, on the anniversary of her death; and she had a perpetual daily memento among the benefactors of the convent to which she proposed to retire on the death of Giovanni, whom she meant to survive, though she was nearly twenty years his senior.

Everybody knew that Giovanni was kept alive only by stimulants and careful nursing, and would die of fright if left alone. Some people declared that he was already dead, and buried in the cellar, and that the mute, silly figure which drove out with Madama, and occupied a chair in the chapel and at table, was a large doll painted and stuffed in his likeness; and many amusing incidents were told in proof. Poor Gio Gio had not yet ceased to make people laugh at his expense.

The day the Alinori went to their villa, the Countess Maria Giorgini heard mass for the first time in the new end of the chapel, the altar in its permanent place against the lance window, and only a half-high curtain hung across the unfinished pavement. All that she could see from her chair as she sat there, that bright October morning, was fresh and splendid.

But she was obliged to cut short her prayers; for the workmen began their day at seven o'clock, and

Peppina, her hand-maiden, came to tell her that they were waiting.

Peppina was not quite accurate in saying that *they* had come; for of the two stone-masons, father and son, only the son, Luigi, had come. But the father could not be long behind; and Peppina, having begun a little skirmishing flirtation with Luigi, wished to take advantage of this moment alone with him.

The father did, in fact, come in a few minutes, and so quietly that he was at the door before they knew, so that the girl had not time to slip behind the curtain, as she had meant to do. She stood her ground, though, with an innocent, "How hard those bricks do come up!"

"I should think so!" remarked the father good-naturedly. "He hasn't got up one yet."

Somewhat shamefaced, Luigi gave a pull at a large, square brick, which seemed to have been more securely fastened than the others, and tossed it aside. As he did so, they all three saw that there were folded papers underneath. Gigi took them up and opened them, and his father took one from him. Each read what was in his hand: then, they exchanged a glance. Peppina leaned on the father's arm and looked over the paper he held. She was not educated, but could manage to spell out the words slowly: "I, Emilia, Countess Giorgini, born"—

"Hush!" whispered the man, glancing about them.

The letter that Luigi had read, began: "My Angel! In three days you will be my wife." And it was signed, "Paulo Giorgini," and directed to the "Signorina Beatrice Lanciani."

The papers were all read through in silence; then, the three looked at each other. What was to be done? Three were too many to keep a secret and profit by it,

even had they been disposed. They all knew the story, and what these documents might possibly prove. Neither could they go to the Signora Maria with the papers in their hands. She would be sure that they had read them.

After a whispered conference, they were replaced where they had been found, the brick was laid over them, and Gigi set to work in another part of the pavement. Then an excuse was found to call the Countess.

"I think, signora," the mason said, "that we shall need a new sill here. Gigi, what are you doing there? Begin at this part to pull the bricks up. As I was saying, signora, the door has" —

"Oh!" cried Peppina, "see what Gigi has found! Signora, there are some papers under this brick. See!"

The old lady turned with a frightened face, and saw Gigi shaking the dust from a handful of papers, and Peppina bending toward him full of vivacious wonder, and making a motion to take them.

"Give them to me!" her mistress said sharply.

She grasped, but did not glance at them. Her eyes were fixed on the place from which they had been drawn. It was directly before the old place of the altar, and would have been under the rug.

"They were under this brick, signora," Luigi said. "See!" He replaced it, showed how the papers had been hidden, that the mortar had been hollowed out underneath to make place for them, and, also, that the mortar around that particular brick was not like that of all the rest of the floor. This later was of white sand, while the old floor had been laid in dark *pozzolana*.

The old lady controlled herself at once.

"It is nothing but some historical record of the old chapel, probably. I will take them to my room to examine. Yes, as you say, Livio, the sill must be raised. Peppina may call the carpenter, and you tell him what is wanted."

She spoke quite calmly; but her hand that held the papers clinched them convulsively, and the hand that held her silver-headed cane struck a blow with it at every step she took. Her usually pallid face was covered with a slight, painful flush, that seemed to be burned into the flesh. Her fate was in her hands. She did not need to look in order to know that here were the papers hidden by the old countess, and that they would proclaim her belief in Beatrice's heirship, even if they could not prove it.

She shut herself into her chamber, and searched for her strongest lens. But, no! she would not read them alone. Some one might doubt if she had been honest. There should be no privacy. She rang her bell, and Peppina came in.

"I am just going for the carpenter, signora," she said brightly. "Livio says" —

"Go down and ask Fra David to come up to me directly," her mistress interrupted.

"Yes, signora!"

The maiden skipped away, and was back again in ten minutes. Fra David had gone to Ombra directly after leaving the palace, and would not return till the next day.

"Is the father guardian at home?"

"Yes; it was the father guardian told me. I saw him in the chapel."

"Go back and ask him to come to me," the Signora Maria commanded.

In another fifteen minutes the father guardian of

the capuchins entered, a calm old man, with a white avalanche of beard over his breast.

She sent the girl away, and briefly told her story. "See!" she said, holding up the hand that still held the papers. "I cannot let them go. My fingers are clinched in them."

The monk took her hand and loosened it, finger by finger, from its stiffened grasp. "You had better take something to calm your nerves," he said.

"Presently. But now I want to have the papers counted and sealed up till Fra David comes back. As soon as he reaches the convent, send him up to me. I will not read them alone. He shall read them first. I sent for you to seal them up. Here is everything needful."

The monk serenely counted the papers, and sealed them in a large sheet of foolscap, writing a few words on the outside.

"Take the seal home with you," the countess said, "and give it to Father David when he comes to-morrow."

"I would counsel you not to agitate yourself, signora," the monk said, rising to go. "If these papers were not enough to impose a duty on the conscience of the Signora Emilia, who was a pious woman, they need not disturb you. You have but taken the place she gave you, and done your duty in it."

It was true. If wrong had been done, it had not been done by her. Her good name need not suffer.

She took comfort, and prepared to wait.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ONE NIGHT.

"Now or never!" Beatrice had said.

There was no one in the house but herself, Don Leonardo, and a simple old servant-woman. Giacomo would come once a day, going between the palace and the villa.

There was no one to interfere between her and the man who for ten years she had called her husband. He should speak. While there was hope of some one coming in an hour or two, he could resist her; but now she could keep him hidden for days.

She laid her plans. It was necessary to frighten him, to make him afraid of her. After the shaking she had given him, he might well believe her able to do anything. Till he gave her that supreme provocation, she had been to him like a sister, if not like a wife. There had been times when she had forgotten what he was, and what she herself was. She had too much heart not to let her moments of contentment shine on him also. He was an old man, weak and decrepit, and horribly afraid of death; and when he had appealed to her pity, she had pitied him.

But now the hour of justice was come.

When little Cesare had gone away just after sunset, she commended Don Leonardo to her servant's care, and, putting a shawl over her head, in the fashion of the common people, hastened through lanes and high-

walled stairs down to the lower piazza of the town, where the Signora Mattei lived.

Palazzo Mattei was a large and pleasant mansion which the family had bought in the early days of their prosperity, and repaired and renamed for themselves; and here they lived with their married sons and daughters. But now the younger people were all at the villa, only the elder couple remaining in town. Signor Mattei was an invalid, and did not like to move.

The Signora Mattei was alone when Beatrice entered, her husband being in conversation with his confessor.

The interview between the two women was a brief one, and left the elder very serious. She promised to see the advocate Randini the next day, and to hold herself and him in readiness for some sudden call. The advocate with his family were at their villa next Villa Alinori. Beatrice had seen them there every year since her marriage, and had established a friendship with her father's old friend. She found him honorable and courageous, and knew that he was interested in herself. There had come to be a certain tacit affection between them. A gallant and still agreeable gentleman, who liked to see a handsome woman, and had a feeling of pity on seeing her tied to a repulsive old man, the advocate Randini found in Beatrice only one blot, — this same marriage. To him Don Leonardo was a scoundrel. How could she, who must have known something of her mother's story, ever have married him? He concluded that she was ambitious, or, perhaps, wished to disprove that story.

Her errand done with the Mattei, Beatrice hastened home, and found her husband sitting alone and gloomy in the gathering twilight.

"What! without a lamp!" she said cheerfully, and herself lighted one and closed the shutters. His early dinner had been brought in to him, and she went out to the dining-room for hers.

Returning in a few minutes, she pushed the door open noiselessly, and parted the curtain, hating to enter. Sometimes she felt a horror of this man; and it assailed her now. She paused and looked at him, wondering how long she must endure the daily sight of his face. He was still strong at times, and the family was long-lived. She might never escape.

Don Leonardo sat where she had left him, and had not heard her approach. He seemed to be thinking earnestly. Had he any premonition of her resolve to make him speak before he slept? He lifted his head, glanced about the room suspiciously, without seeing her, then stole a side-long look at the crimson chair by the window.

She bent eagerly forward, her lips parted in the breathlessness of her attention. What was it about the chair? She stood a moment watching him, and laying her plans anew. She would say nothing that night. Then she drew silently back, and, advancing again with a firm step, entered the room.

"The Signor Mattei is better," she said. "They think that he may regain the use of his right hand"

"He is older than I am," said Don Leonardo.

"Yes," she answered, and let him take what comfort he could from the fact. "Shall I ring the bell for Teta? It is nine o'clock."

The old woman came, and led him to his room, lighted his candle and night-lamp, and waited in the *salon* till he called her to take his candle away.

When she was alone again, Beatrice sat for a while watching his door, till his heavy breathing told that

he slept, or feigned sleep. Then she changed her position so as to face the crimson chair, studying minutely its position.

When this was impressed upon her mind, she rose and went carelessly to her own bedroom, seeming to shut herself in, but only closing the door with the latch held back till she should have extinguished her candle. This done, she returned to the *salon*, and noiselessly moved the crimson chair into her chamber, locked her door, and lighted a lamp.

Then again she listened; but there was no sound. He would hardly come out again. If he wanted anything, he would ring.

Even if he were only making believe asleep, he could not have found out what she was doing. She knew well enough how sly he was. And here was the chair. If it contained a mystery, that mystery must out now!

She knelt down and felt the cushions over with her careful finger-tips, but found nothing. Then she examined the narrow shoulder cushion, and still without result. She looked the wood work over carefully, and the lion's feet, and then returned to the cushion of the seat, pressing with cautious finger-tips around the edge. And here at last she felt something that sent lightning flashing through her every nerve. It was a stiff corner of folded paper, not too stiff to bend a little. She closely examined the cushion, and found no sign of its having been ripped; then turned the chair over, and examined it underneath.

The seat was made of strong interwoven tapes, that, as she looked closely, showed signs of having been displaced. They had regained their position, but the creases remained.

Beatrice worked her finger carefully in and along

the edge of the cushion till it touched the paper, then, with a tremulous care, drew it from the wool and out.

It was a triangular little package, made of a square of stiff paper, enclosed in a cover of tissue paper, both discolored by time.

Her head whirled with the swift rush of blood to it as she opened the stiff folds and read what was written there in faded, but still distinct, characters. It was a dream!

Half an hour passed quietly. Beatrice moved and looked like a person half asleep or half stunned. She went to the crucifix that hung beside her bed, and stood there a little while with her arms up over it and her cheek pressed to the sculptured figure of the Divine Martyr. She made a movement to open her window, and desisted. Then she read the document again, and recovered her mental balance.

Searching for a square of stiff paper, she folded it into the same shape and size as the one she had found, and carefully pushed it into the cushion, smoothing the tapes into their places, and feeling that the point should not be too evident. Then she put out her light, and noiselessly carried the chair out into the *salon*, placing it precisely in the spot she had taken it from. This done, she listened at Don Leonardo's door.

He was still breathing heavily.

Locking herself into her room again, and lighting her candle, she changed her dress for a flannel wrapper, and sewed the paper she had found into her corsets.

It was now midnight; but sleep was impossible, and inaction was impossible. Some vent was necessary for the agitation that, stilled for a while by a

sudden shock, began to tremble and threaten to overwhelm her.

She went softly out in the darkness, feeling her way along the corridors to the dining-room. The shutters stood open toward the garden, and the rising moon threw a pure and melancholy light across the floor and table. She stood a moment looking up into the garden, and at the house-tops visible over the high wall, then went out into the corridor again and felt her way upstairs.

All the world was still. There was not a breath of a breeze in the cool, bright night. The tree-shadows were black, the vine trellis hung a thick, silver-spotted screen over the long walk. Everything seemed to be waiting for her. She went out. Whatever had perfume sent it forth: where the moon shone fully on a bough its fruit showed clearly, — peach or pear, fig or pomegranate. Every large passion flower on the fading vine shone with a lustre of its own: the red roses hung soft black balls, betrayed only by their fragrance.

No one could hear her step on the sandy path; and no one distinguish her gliding shadow from the many shadows on every side. Beatrice wrapped her shawl about her, and walked up and down, her agitation constantly growing.

It was well for her that no one of those persons who have a mania for finding that other people are out of their minds could see her pacing the garden that night, for she gave herself the rein; though, whether it was to joy or to grief, it would have been hard to tell. She danced and laughed a moment with a capricious grace; she declaimed and gesticulated; she poured out her story to the listening night in passionate whispers; she wept. All her love came out, from its first humble adoration to its delirious pas-

sion, from its first pang of jealousy, as bitter as death, to the moment when its last spark flickered out at a look, and fell into nothingness.

A second love demeans a first love; and the dying-out of one passion proves the others mortal. She could laugh at love; but she could not laugh at the time it had made her lose.

Her hates spoke themselves out; growing bitter in remembrance, they broke into a curse that faltered suddenly into penitence. Her griefs, all those heart-breaking pangs that she had not dared to remember, lest they should crush her, rose once again, and spoke before falling out of sight forever. The pathetic loss, the disillusion, the childlike quivering pain all overflowed her eyes once more. Her whole repressed and tortured life poured itself forth.

The stars, large and faint in the humid air, seemed to tremble with attention; the leaves hung motionless, as if not to interrupt her with their rustling. The white moon, more than half gone, like her life, with its edges ragged where the light had been torn away, like her life, hung above in the solemn, cloudless blue, an almost audible response to every phase of her passionate outbreak.

With the first hint of day in the east came a recollection of conventional life. Fine and intangible as cobwebs, the threads that form our social bonds slipped down with the coming light. Beatrice became conscious of having behaved in an abnormal manner, to say the least. She stopped walking, and looked over the wall at the eastern sky, where the stars were growing pale. She found herself a little faint and exhausted. With one full, backward sigh, trusting her soul to the secrecy of the departing night, she went quietly into the house.

In the dining-room was a little coffee biggin prepared for the morning. She filled the strainer, and made herself a cup of coffee, warming her fingers at the blazing alcohol.

A shuffling step came along the corridor, and Teta made her appearance, open-mouthed at the vision of her mistress already up and at work. Madama always had her coffee in bed, and was inclined to be late in the morning.

"What calls you out so early, Teta?" Beatrice asked, half suspicious of the woman.

"Why, it is my hour, Madama. I am always up at five o'clock, and sometimes earlier. I have to make the fires, and then go to the *piazza* to do the marketing. If I go late, everything has been picked over; and Giacomo brings nothing to the house now. Yesterday Don Leonardo threatened to strike me with his cane, because he said the tomatoes were not fresh enough. They were nearly all sold when I got there; and Giacomo said it was my fault. I said it was his."

"Of course it was his," Beatrice said. "He can leave the stuff in the *piazza* that is to be sold; but he must bring what we want here. Tell him that I say so. And, Teta, don't let Don Leonardo strike you. If he lifts his cane, leave him at once, and come to tell me. You need not say anything to him. And now, make you a good cup of coffee before you go out." She measured out some as she spoke.

This was a generous offer, as the servants' coffee was measured out to them, a sprinkling of coffee with much chiccory, and this was unmixed as well as plentiful.

"Thank you, Madama," the old woman said. "I hardly ever drink coffee. I prefer the shirt of the capuchin," and she laughed.

In Italy, the shirt of the capuchin is a tumbler of wine.

"What! you drink wine in the morning?"

Beatrice opened a sideboard with her pass-key, and poured out a tumbler of red wine, locking the bottle up again.

"I am going to bed now," she said. "I have not slept well. Don't disturb me, and tell Don Leonardo not to. When you go out this morning, tell the barber to come to him to-day. Tell him to come — let me see! — about five o'clock. And tell Giacomo to bring in some *broccoli* from the villa this afternoon."

"She is the mistress of the house now!" muttered Teta, as the lady went away, raising her eyebrows a little at the unusual tone of command assumed by Beatrice. And, in fact, she had unconsciously adopted a quite new authority. She had no more the uneasy sense that if she did not ask a servant humbly, as a favor, she might be refused.

Her *salon* was quite dark. She opened the windows wide to the morning air, looked to see that the crimson chair was in its proper place, then went into her chamber and locked herself in. Throwing herself on to her bed, dressed as she was, she sighed, smiled, and dropped to sleep like a child.

She seemed scarcely to have slept when she was awakened by a knocking at her door. It was the Signora Mattei who begged admittance.

"Forgive me, Bice!" she said, all excitement, when the door opened. "Teta told me your orders; but I could not wait. I have a piece of news."

She shut the door, and sat down by Beatrice's pillow. "You know the Peppina who lives in Palazzo Giorgini?" she said. "Well, her mother came over from Sanzio last evening in the *diligenza*. The *vet-*

turino is her brother. She came to tell me what may be great news for you, Bice."

The story of the finding of the papers followed.

"Oh! they are mine! They are mine!" cried Beatrice, starting up.

"I think that we may trust Fra David," her friend said. "At all events, we will wait and see what he says about it. In any case, we know what the papers are."

Beatrice was up, and feverishly dressing herself. "That letters written by my father to my mother should be in that woman's hands, — in any hands but mine!" she exclaimed. "Oh! I would rather have those letters than diamonds! I must have them, whether they prove anything for me or not. Just think, Sor Chiara! I never saw my father or mother, and I have not a word of their writing, nor an article that was theirs. Those letters I will have!"

"Bice, you may spoil all!" her friend urged. "Before telling you, didn't I make you promise to do nothing without my consent? Recollect, the Signora Maria thinks that no one knows what those papers are. She does not yet know herself. She will only know this afternoon when Fra David opens them. This is all confidential. If there should be any fraud used in the matter, we have those three witnesses, who may be willing to tell the truth if you do not anger them. But if you expose them to the Signora Maria as having first read the papers, and then replaced them to be found again, they are sure to turn against you. Besides, it would throw doubt on the authenticity of the papers."

Beatrice considered, and found it easy to submit.

"You are right!" she said; and the Signora Matteo was surprised to see her become immediately serene.

"I will betray no knowledge of what the papers are. I will not even say that I know they have been found, though that fact is public. I will merely ask her if anything has been found. It will make her afraid to change or destroy them."

The Mattei demurred.

"Lend me your carriage, and let Marta accompany me," Beatrice said coaxingly. "I will be very prudent. Since it was notorious that we expected to find something years ago, and that the Signora Maria with her chaplain searched after the old countess, my grandmother Tessa, died, what more natural than that I should go to ask if, in the course of her improvements, any discovery has been made?"

"But will you have the confidence to face her?" asked the Mattei doubtfully. "You have never met her since the day she turned you out."

Beatrice rose from her chair, and seemed to grow taller as she lifted her head with a slight, scornful laugh. "'The confidence to face her?'" she repeated. "I doubt if she will have the confidence to face me!"

The argument was long, but the new-born will conquered.

"I have a fancy for seeing the old palace again," she said. "Do you remember the day I went there with Betta? I did not tell you then, but I searched the chapel through that day."

"Suppose that she will not receive you?" said her friend uneasily. "She may refuse."

"Let her refuse if she dare!" exclaimed Beatrice.

"Why, what could you do?" asked the Mattei, who thought that Madama was losing her head.

Beatrice looked at her steadily, smiling into her eyes; then took her face between two soft hands, and kissed her forehead.

"I can make her repent!" she said. "And now don't be anxious. I will act like a true Countess Giorgini on her best behavior."

"I wish you were one before all the world!" the Mattei exclaimed fervently.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"IT NEVER RAINS BUT IT POURS."

The Signora Maria did not sleep very well the night after finding the papers; and she was obliged to do without a mass the next morning. It seemed an evil omen. It did not happen once in three years that she could not have a mass. But to-day Fra David was out of town, and there had been so many sick-calls that the *cappuccini* could not send her any one else. Moreover, she did not feel able to go out to church anywhere.

"It is a bad beginning!" she muttered, as she waited for Fra David to appear.

At last he came; and they went into the chapel together, that seeming the most suitable place for so solemn a business.

The masons, after having taken up the old pavement the day before, had been ordered to discontinue work till further notice.

The old lady, trembling in every limb, silently gave the sealed package to the monk, then knelt before the altar, and hid her face in her hands. She had been a hard and jealous old woman, and the prospect of humiliation was terrible to her.

A silence followed, in which the breaking of the seals, and the rustling of the papers, sounded with a startling distinctness. The Signora Maria said to herself that those papers might be her death-warrant. To her mind, the triumph of Beatrice meant a degra-

dation and ruin without measure for herself. Could it be that, after a long life in which she had striven to do her duty and maintain a dignified reputation, she was to be stricken down and proved a sham at last? It must be so, since he did not speak at once and relieve her torment.

"Signora," said the *frate*, touching her shoulder, "the letters are important, but not conclusive."

She lifted her face with a faint cry.

"The Countess Emilia meant to search for proofs of her son's marriage, and thought it probable that they might be found," he went on. "But she had done nothing when these papers were hidden."

"Oh!" exclaimed the Signora Maria, and stood up with a deep sigh of relief.

"There are letters of Paulo," said the *frate*, "in which he speaks of his approaching marriage, and afterward addresses the girl as his wife; but he does not mention the name of the priest who married them, nor the church where they were married, nor the witnesses."

The Signora Maria drew another deep sigh of relief, and stood more erect.

"I would recommend you to send for Francesco, and give the papers into his hands," pursued her adviser. "In that way, you throw off all responsibility. No one can suspect or blame you. He is the person chiefly interested. You have a life-lease of an apartment here, and a sufficient income, whatever may happen. But if Paulo's marriage is proved, Francesco has nothing at all in Sanzio."

"Do you think that I would remain in the house if she were mistress of it?" exclaimed the old woman, drawing herself up. "I should retire at once to a convent."

"And Giovanni?" asked the *frate*, looking at her attentively.

"He, of course, would stay here. It was always his home. Pietro and Lina would serve him. They serve him now. He does not need me at all."

"You would make a fine scandal," said Fra David severely. "You would give people reason to say that you only took care of Giovanni for the sake of being a countess, and the mistress of a fortune, and were ready to abandon him when he most needed you. It would be a denying of all your past claims of devotion to him to say that Pietro and Lina are all that he needs. Besides, a wife can never desert her husband without cause."

She stood silent and frowning.

"It may not come to that," the *frate* said more comfortingly. "As I have said, these papers are not sufficient. Give them to Francesco, and let him act. Keep yourself from being imbroiled."

"Francesco might promise to marry her when Leonardo dies," the countess said. "Leonardo cannot last long. That might keep her quiet. Then, it would be better for all that he should come, with or without her. I tell you, Fra David, she will trample on you all, if she comes alone. She would do as Francesco wishes, so everybody knows. But, mistress here alone, she would revenge herself on everybody who has favored me. You know she confesses to the Franciscans of Saint Clara, and here in Sanzio would be sure to do everything for them. They get everything away from you, those grand gentlemen in black!"

She spoke in a low, insinuating voice, her eyes fixed on the monk's face. She knew well that a certain jealousy lay between these *frati*, who followed the

exact humility, in dress and mode of life, of Saint Francis, and the other divisions of their order which allow themselves shirts, stockings, and hats.

Fra David felt the stab. It was certainly an advantage for the capuchins to have the mistress of casa Giorgini as a patroness.

"Signora Maria," he said with dignity, "I can only repeat what I have said as to your duty. Who the future master and mistress of this house may choose to confess to, is their own affair. I only hope that they may attend well to their religious duties."

She smiled faintly. Then her anxious look returned. "Francesco has visitors with him now," she said. "It is a bad time to trouble his mind. He is, moreover, at the villa, and will be making wine this month. Would it not be better to wait till those strangers are gone away?"

"It might be," the monk said, after a moment's thought. "As you say, it would make some agitation. The affair should be calmly and prudently investigated. I see no harm in waiting till they are gone."

"And now," said the Signora Maria, with the air of one from whom an immense weight has been lifted, "now read me the letters."

He read them, sealed them up again, and went away.

The Signora Maria went out to her own chamber, and locked the package up in a safe. She had a month's respite; and then it was Francesco Alinori who must do battle. As Fra David had said, Francesco had more at stake than she had.

Peppina put her head in at the door to say that a lady wished to speak with the Signora Maria.

"Who is she?"

"She did not give me a card; and I have never

seen her before, signora," said the girl, who knew perfectly well who the visitor must be.

It was many years since the Signora Maria had seen Beatrice, and then only at a distance, one day when she had driven to Ombra to visit a convent. Neither did she expect to see her now. Yet no sooner did the lady rise at her approach than she knew by whom she was confronted. "In what can I serve the signora?" she asked coldly.

"I am sorry to incommode the Signora Contessa," Beatrice said with perfect respect. "I will detain her but a moment. I am Beatrice Alinori."

"Speak!" said the Signora Maria; and the slight motion of her head could scarcely be called a salutation.

Beatrice made a movement to sit down, but, finding that the other remained standing, recovered herself immediately with an "Excuse me!" and a look of quiet surprise.

The countess seated herself, and waved her hand. After all, this strong, superb creature, who looked as fresh as a rose, was the wife of an Alinori, and her cousin by marriage. The old woman grew faint before the calm gaze of those bright eyes. Was there as much blood in her own poor body as flowed in one second through one wrist of one of those gently folded hands before her? She remembered with terror that she had turned this woman into the street as an outcast thirty-five years before.

"I have learned that the Signora Contessa has been repairing her chapel, and that it is now nearly completed," Beatrice said. "And I wish very much to know if in demolishing the walls any papers were found which might be of interest to me. The Signora Contessa" — she seemed to take pleasure in insisting

on the title, and smiled slightly every time she repeated it — "may recollect that there was an impression everywhere, at the time my grandmother died, that something might be found."

"I had not the honor of being acquainted with your grandmother, madam, or of knowing anything of her affairs," said the old woman, controlling herself.

"I refer to my grandmother Giorgini, the former countess," said Beatrice with a sweet smile.

"I presume that the signora has heard some servant's story," the countess said bitterly.

"I should take no notice of a mere servant's story," Beatrice said, without showing the least resentment. "As I have already said, I am not alone in having the impression that the Countess Emilia's sudden death prevented her realizing some plan she had in my regard. She was most affectionate toward me. At her death, she seemed to say that an explanation would be found in the chapel. Nothing was discovered, unless" — she spoke very slowly — "there may have been some discovery which I have not had the fortune to hear of. It is quite natural, then, that the first time the chapel is perfectly dismantled since her death, I should ask if anything has been found."

"I have always supposed that the countess referred to her own well known wish to restore the chapel, not to any secrets hidden there," the Signora Maria replied.

"There has, then, been nothing found?" said Beatrice, in a tone less interrogative than conclusive.

"I do not say that," was the quick response. "I, of course, perceive that the signora has not come here without having heard from my workmen or servant that some papers have been found belonging to the Countess Emilia. My confessor has but just read them to me. They do not change the succession, if that is

what the signora hopes for." She could not restrain a slight, bitter laugh. "These papers will be given to Count Francesco Alinori, as the next heir. I have no interest in them."

The bright, dark eyes had been steadily fixed on her face while she spoke, and seemed to grow brighter.

"Would you be so kind as to let me look at these papers?" Beatrice asked in a low voice, which had a singular coldness in its tone.

"Certainly not! As I have said, they concern Francesco, and will be consigned to him."

"They do not concern me?" asked Beatrice.

"I can say no more, signora," said the old woman. "Doubtless Francesco will speak to you on the subject. I decline to answer any more questions, except to assure you that the papers do not affect the succession. They are an affair merely of sentiment."

Beatrice rose with an elaborate courtesy which thinly covered a perfect contempt, and apologized for having occupied so much of the old lady's time. She courtesied to her with a smiling insolence.

"Till we meet again, Signora Giorgini!" she said, stripping off the other's title with a word, and making of the usual salutation, *à rivederla*, a menace, by the faint emphasis with which it was pronounced.

The answering salutation was a matter of habit alone; for a great fear fell upon the Signora Maria. She stood by the chair where she had sat, and watched her visitor's departure. She had a sense of thunder in the air, and to her confused mind it seemed that something had been struck.

"Till we meet again, Signora Giorgini!" she repeated mechanically.

Beatrice walked slowly down the long *salon*, and turned at the door, as if sure of finding her hostess

where she had left her. Seeing her, she courtesied again on the threshold, and disappeared.

The drive back to Ombra was delicious. Beatrice leaned back in the carriage, and imagined it her own. She glanced at the people in the streets of Sanzio, and thought how they would take off their hats to her, and bow and gaze, if indeed it were her own carriage, and she the Giorgini. The people in the country road did take off their hats, with Italian courtesy, those poor people not having learned to think that independence and rudeness are synonymous terms.

Nina was just coming out of the palace when Beatrice reached home, and at a sign from her returned to the vestibule.

"Keep a close watch on all visitors that come to the villa, Nina," she said. "Let me know at once if any special business seems to be going on. Is there anything new?"

"No, madama. Only the count is sure to accompany the ladies back to Venice."

"When will they go?"

"In about a fortnight, I think. Madame Elise said they must be at home the last week of October."

Beatrice went upstairs.

"She is rather more grand than usual," thought Nina, pursuing her way. She was accustomed to a more insinuating confidence from the lady, and a less commanding tone.

Beatrice found her husband very glum, and very curious regarding her visit to Sanzio. He had only just learned from his barber that the Signora Mattei had not gone with her.

"I have brought you some chocolate," she said, giving him a paper. "I will come back when you are shaved."

His face was, in fact, one-half covered with a lather; and a rosy-faced old man was standing beside him, razor in hand. When the shaving should be finished, the two would have a chat together, and Don Leonardo would learn all the gossip of the town. This was his one dissipation, and looked forward to with vivid interest. He had even established the custom of giving his barber a glass of wine, in order to prolong the conversation, and give it more volubility.

Beatrice went up to the garden, where she had seen Giacomo. There was still a faint glow of sunset in the sky, though the east was growing purple with night. The man was gathering grapes, and affected not to see her, though he retreated at her approach.

She placed herself in his path. "Giacomo, why did Ciglia kill your father?" she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently, and glanced about him.

"There is no one to listen," she said. "Tell me."

He looked at her attentively with his gloomy eyes. "It is death to tell," he muttered.

"Do you think that I will betray you?" she asked. "I will shield you. It is for my interest to shield you. I believe, as you do, that it was Ciglia. But tell me why he did it."

"Father told me that day he spoke to you in the laurels," the man said, with a frightened look. "Ciglia saw him speak to you. He was always watching father. Then he saw father and me talking together down where we thrashed the grain. He couldn't hear what we said. He was behind a tree. When father saw him there he said: 'Ciglia will kill me. He knows that I am telling you.' And somebody will kill me, signora, if I am seen telling you."

The man moved off abruptly. Beatrice called out

to him, "Reach me down this large bunch, Giacomo. I want it for dinner."

He returned. "Go on with your work," she said. "It will look strange if you seem to fly from me. Tell me one thing; then go for the ladder there against the wall. After a minute or two, I will go away and come back again. It will not seem a conversation."

"Father was sorry for what he did," said Giacomo, affecting to stretch his arm for a bunch of grapes that he could not reach. "It was Ciglia pushed him on and gave him money."

"Whose money?" asked Beatrice breathlessly.

Giacomo, without answering, went off for the ladder, and she stood looking up at a bunch of translucent yellow grapes that seemed to waver against the sky. She stretched her hand, and grasped a post of the trellis for support in the momentary dizziness that overpowered her.

Giacomo came back with the ladder, placed it, then paused and looked straight into her eyes.

"Whose?" she whispered.

He glanced toward the house, went up the ladder, glanced toward the house again, and, under cover of the vine-leaves, pointed his thumb at Don Leonardo's window.

He then cut off the cluster she wanted, and gave it to her.

"Did Francesco know anything about it?" she asked, standing behind the ladder as he came down.

"No!" he answered with his breath in her face. Then he took the ladder, and carried it away.

"Cut me some sage for a pillow," she said when he came back, and went out into the open garden, where a bed of the herb grew rankly.

"Did more than one know anything about it?" she asked, as he bent to cut the sage.

"Only one!"

"Do something while I go to get a basket for the sage."

He went for another knife, and she brought a basket.

"Who was that one? Tell me his name."

The man closed his lips firmly and looked down.

"Well?" she said, yielding the point.

"Ciglia gave father a letter to give Paulo at night. Paulo came out with them the next night. He thought that he was going to see the advocate Randini."

"Who wrote the letter?"

The man was silent.

"Who gave the letter to Ciglia?"

No answer. Giacomo tossed sprays of the sage plant into her basket. "Isn't there enough?" he asked, holding the basket up.

"Who gave Ciglia the money?" she asked.

"How do I know?" he asked, and, throwing the knife down, walked away.

Beatrice looked at her basket of sage, shook it up, then went to set it on the wall by the stair leading down to the house. Then she gathered some flowers; then, returning to the grapery, she called out, "Giacomo, here's a tarantula! Come quickly and kill it."

He did not dare not to hasten, for the call might have been heard by others.

"Tell me who gave the money, or I will kill you!" she said, grasping him as he entered the trellis-walk, her hands like a tiger's claws, sharp and strong.

Giacomo hesitated a moment, tried feebly to free his arm, then nodded toward Don Leonardo's window.

"Leonardo?"

He nodded.

"What did they do?"

"Let me go!" said Giacomo. "Somebody will see us."

"No one can see us. The shrubs and the wall prevent. Make haste! What did they do?"

"How do I know what they did?" said the man roughly. "I tell you I don't know anything about it. Do you want to get me murdered?"

"Ciglia is dead," she said, following him as he broke from her; "and that other one in the house is impotent to do you a harm. I could throw him down to the rats in the dark court if I would. He has no money to hire anybody now. His money passes through my hands. He has only enough to pay his barber and buy tobacco. He is completely in my hands. He cannot speak to any one without my knowledge. How much money did he give? How did he give it?"

"He said one day to Ciglia that he knew somebody who had said that he would give a hundred *scudi* if Paulo were dead. Ciglia did not answer; but the next day he asked Don Leonardo to lend him twenty *scudi*, and got it. A week later he asked him for fifty *scudi* to buy a piece of land, and got it. But he didn't buy the land. Then a week or two later he asked for thirty *scudi*, and got it. That made the hundred. He kept the money in gold napoleons in a hole in a tree up the mountain, in Sanzio. From that day that he got all the money, he never spoke to Don Leonardo but once. That time Don Leonardo told him that the advocate Randini was coming out to his villa, and wanted to see Paulo. He said that Paulo was in danger and must be warned, and gave him a

letter that he said the advocate Randini wrote. The advocate wasn't at his villa, and didn't come, and hadn't been there."

"My father came!" Beatrice exclaimed in tones of anguish. "He believed and came!"

Giacomo looked at her quickly. For the first time it seemed to strike him that this Paulo was her father, and that she might have some sort of grief for him, even if she had never seen him.

He did not answer, and she did not insist.

"Do you know anything about the marriage?" she asked after a moment.

"Father said that the sacristan at the *Refuge of Sinners* was too fond of wine, and used to get tipsy, so that they wouldn't let him have only just so much wine in the convent. One day he went to see Don Leonardo for something, and came away with a flask of wine in his cloak. That night he forgot to lock the side door of the church, and when father was passing by early in the morning, before daylight, he saw a man come out."

Beatrice drew a deep breath, as though suffocating, turned away, and went into the house. She found Don Leonardo still chatting with the barber, and laughing at some story of his.

She went out to the kitchen, where Teta was getting dinner, and stood there a moment warming her hands. Giacomo came in with a basket of grapes, set them down, and went away.

"I will go down and bolt the *portone* behind him," she said to Teta. "It is Ave Maria."

She followed the man down the dim stair, and at every turn he looked back at her over his shoulder as if she were a ghost following. When they reached the vestibule, he lingered a little, and let her pass him

to the great door. She stood behind it, slowly pushing it to, and he went toward it slowly, looking at her steadily as she was steadily looking at him.

There was left only room for him to pass through, and he was already half through when he made a momentary pause, and turned his head over his shoulder. His lips close to her ear, he whispered:

"The well under the laurels!"

Then the door shut between them.

CHAPTER XXXV.

SPIRIT-FLOWERS.

ATALANTA rose early in the country, and the first hour of the day was given to little Cesare, who was constantly in her company. They ranged the groves together, gave each other lessons in Italian or English, and had a thousand confidences.

"Have you skies like that?" he asked her one morning as they paced up and down in front of the house just as the sun was rising.

"Oh, yes; and some more beautiful. Our skies are sometimes like a garden of flowers, and sometimes like a world on fire, and then pure silver. Then, at times, we have your Italian sunset, which is a sun-flower."

"But the sun," the boy said jealously; "here it shines so — *splende di tutto cuore!*"

Atalanta stopped, smiling. It seemed to her just the difference. In Italy the sun shone with all its heart; in America, with all its might.

"Is the sun ever in the Lion with you?" asked the child.

"Yes; but we call them dog-days."

"Is it true that your snow is like Carrara marble, and that you cut it in blocks?"

"Yes; and we could build a house of it that would last for weeks, maybe longer."

"Are your trees green?"

"In the summer. Some of them are green all the

year. Those are the sentinel trees which never go to sleep. Or they are mourning trees. You cut down an oak there, and a pine grows up, and sighs and sighs!"

"Do the almond-trees blossom out all white in February or March?"

"No; but all the trees seem to blossom when they first wake in the spring. They are a sort of pinkish, greenish, yellowish, brown—ish."

"Do you have little dirty children like that?" They had come upon a little ragged, half-naked child, of one of the work-women. It sat in the dust of the road, and seemed to be contentedly counting its own fingers. A bell was heard distinctly ringing from the town. The child raised its face, and sang out in a clear, frank voice, "*Evviva, Maria! Evviva, Jesu!*" slapping its hands in the dust in time, and covering itself in a cloud.

No; she had seen no such children; but it was not the ugliness that she thought of, it was the beauty.

"It is a dear child," she said, and went on in silence for a moment, wondering what her father would have said of it.

"Is your father an Indian?" asked her companion presently.

"What!" cried Atalanta, stopping. Then she laughed. "Oh! you think that I am a descendant of the savages. No, dear. It is as though your grandfather and grandmother had gone over there, and you had been born there."

"I saw a black man once," the boy said. "He was a gentleman's servant. Nina said he was black because he had ink in his veins for blood. He was an American."

"Their blood is as red as yours," she said. "And,

I suppose, there is no difference between the two. Do you know what my father says of them?" Atalanta quoted her father in season and out of season. "He says that, in the creation of the human race, the negro was Nature's blotting-book."

The count came out of the house with a rifle slung over his shoulder. He was going out with a hunting-party, and had already had his coffee.

"I don't want to go," he said, stooping to kiss his boy. "But they expect me to. I shall be back in a few hours."

He seemed to speak to Cesare, and his voice was low and tender.

"What are you going to do this morning, Signorina?" he asked.

"I have to finish my home letter for Giacomo to post," she said. "That presently. I know what I would like to do this minute!"

He smilingly unslung his rifle, and put it into her hands. "There is nothing living to shoot, but you might try a mark."

Cesare ran to set a grape-leaf up on a fence. "I don't care to kill anything," said Atalanta. "I am growing pitiful of living things. But I want to hit something."

She raised the rifle in speaking, and at the same instant glanced at Count Alinori. He was looking at her with his guard off. His head slightly bent, he gazed steadily at her eyes, a faint, fascinating smile almost more in his eyes than on his lips. That gaze enveloped her with an unspeakable fondness.

She aimed her rifle, all of a tremor, all pink in the face and neck suddenly, pink in the hands too, and fired. And, having fired, she stood motionless, looking at the mark, and feeling herself in the midst

of a warm whirlpool, spinning slowly and smoothly round.

"It is my fault!" the count said hastily. "You thought I was laughing at your mark. You must not look at any one when you are about to fire. A face distracts the thought for a moment."

"Yes," she said mechanically, giving back the rifle.

"Do you care that you have missed?" he asked softly, bending his head a little to smile into her downcast face, that had grown very serious.

"Oh, no!" she said with an effort. "But it is the first time."

"Never mind! We will try again to-morrow. Don't let me go away seeing you cast down. Nothing must hurt or disturb you. I would destroy all the rifles in the world rather than you should be displeased because of one, — if I could destroy them. Who would think that you would insist on being more fortunate than the oldest hunters, who sometimes miss!"

There was a mixture of tenderness and playfulness in his tone and words, which made her smile, though she still kept her eyes fixed on the mark. In a brief moment many thoughts had rushed into her mind. For the first time she thought of love in relation to a man, — not the love that marries, but that sympathetic affection which binds two persons all their lives, so that you cannot touch one but the other vibrates. Where had she read of such things? She could not recollect. There had been beautiful stories of the friendships of famous people, golden old legends set like gems in the rude ages past. Could it be that such a fate was hers?

Too exalted for the moment to be timid, she turned and looked earnestly into the count's face, an excited, half frightened glance.

If one were suddenly invited to step across an easy threshold into heaven, one would, perhaps, shrink back at first.

Count Alinori evaded the look. There were some pinks growing near them, and he bent to select the finest one. He broke the stem, and held it out to her. "The pinks need tying up. Is that a fragrant one?" he asked, without looking up.

"So sweet!" she said, taking it from him and becoming herself again. With his first calm word and careless look, the supernatural retreated from her vision.

"And now good-by, Cesare *mio!*" the father said, and kissed his son. "Good-by, *Madamigella!*" lifting his hat to her. "If you will put breakfast off till one o'clock, I will be with you."

He mounted his horse and rode away, the two standing where he had left them, and looking after him. At the curve of the road he turned, and took his hat off, with a lingering backward glance; at which the boy waved his hand, and shouted an "*Addio!*" and Atalanta bent her head, steadily and smilingly gazing.

Then he disappeared, and she went into the house to write one page more to her long weekly letter home.

Every little incident was told, save the one which she knew not how to tell: Cesare's ideas concerning America; the shot that she had missed, though it was not at a hopping mark; the hunting club that Count Alinori had gone to, and that they would put off breakfast an hour for him; the large rose-colored pinks, and that she must send them some seeds or a root. "The one the count broke off for me scents all my chamber." There were gay messages to all her

friends at Beechlands; and the letter ended: "I am so happy that I could not be any happier. I hope that no new delight will come to me for a while, for I am full."

It was yet October when the letter reached its destination; and all the family gathered round while the doctor read it out. Mary looked over the page as he read, her arm in his, her cheek against his shoulder.

James Martin was in Southport, and the three boys, Dick, Francis, and Charles, were in college; but the four younger children, William and Mary, Kitty and Robert, were at home; and they had visitors. Miss Edith Selwyn was there with her brother's youngest daughter, Fanny. Miss Selwyn had never married.

The Martins and Selwyns were very intimate. Doctor Selwyn always declared that he owed his fortune and his wife to Doctor Martin; and it was his first wish that their children should intermarry. Already James Martin was engaged to the eldest daughter, Edith; and there were premonitory signs that a second alliance between the two families was not unlikely. William Martin, now a dashing, self-confident boy of sixteen, was unmistakably devoted to Fanny Selwyn; and it could be perceived that she looked upon him with a complacent kindness.

They all stood round and listened to the letter, Nancy listening from the doorway, her sleeves pushed up, a broad smile on her face, and a broom in her hand.

As the doctor folded the letter, after dwelling on it a little, an addition was made to their number. Silvio Heath entered with the familiarity of one quite at home in the house, and was greeted with a chorus of, "Oh! Silvio, a letter from 'Talanta." "And Count Alinori calls her Alata, which is 'winged,' you know."

"And she missed the mark, a great grape-leaf. Only think of that!"

"You might take the letter, Silvio," the doctor said. "And when your folks have read it give it to the Perrys."

Atalanta's letters went the rounds of the whole neighborhood of intimate old friends; and her adventures in Europe were the talk of all those simple families. Not one of them but had a pressed flower, or a photograph, or some other little foreign keepsake that had come from her across the sea.

Silvio was now a good-looking young man, blond and serious. He was just entering upon his career as an architect, with a fair prospect of success. The building of Doctor Martin's fine new house, an important event in all the county, had called his attention to architecture, and solved the problem of his life. There had been a troubled moment before that as to what he should do with himself.

The doctor encouraged him heartily.

"You are studying the primeval science," he said. "God was the first architect, and the building of the universe his first act of which we have any record."

The Martins interested themselves in all that Silvio did, and in their family he was almost like a son. A simple, gentlemanly fellow, he was loved by them all. He took the letter in silence, and put it carefully into his breast-pocket.

"I cannot stop," he said. "It is almost dinner-time at home. I only came in to tell you that they have accepted my plan of the church at Four Corners."

A chorus of congratulations greeted his news. He received them rather absently, turning toward the door.

"But you have time to hear Fanny's new song,"

Kitty called out to him. "It's only just come, and is short."

He came and leaned in at the open window to listen, while Fanny, who had been sitting on the piano-stool, whirled herself round, and touched the keys.

Miss Selwyn looked uneasy, and murmured something about it being wrong to keep Silvio from his dinner; but no one heard her.

Fanny sang: —

"O Laurie, O my lassie,
Where are you gone!
My heart it aches with calling you;
The tears drop, one by one.
For heavy is the nightfall,
And heavy is the dawn,
O Laurie, O my lassie,
Now that you are gone!

In the fields we walked in summer,
The grass is turning brown:
From the trees that overshadowed us
The leaves are falling down.
They rustle in my pathway
As I wander there alone.
O Laurie, O my lassie,
Where are you gone!

'Twas your smile that made the sunshine!
'Twas your voice that made the song!
'Twas your heart, so true and tender,
That kept my own heart strong!
Now my courage fails and falters,
As I linger on alone.
O Laurie, my heart's darling,
Where are you gone!"

The blond head in the window bowed itself a little, and the eyes looked down.

When the song ended, "It is very pretty!" mut-

tered the young man in a suffocated voice, and turned abruptly away.

Miss Selwyn had strolled slowly toward the window when the song began, and her figure covered his retreat. She stood there and looked after him with deep pity in her eyes, and was scarcely surprised to see that, instead of taking the homeward road, he turned into a path that led to the forest.

The young people went out, and the three elders were left together. There was a moment of silence that was, perhaps, a little conscious. Then the doctor said, "I'm glad the child is so happy."

"Atalanta is a woman!" said Edith Selwyn in a low, quiet voice that was very significant.

The other two looked at her quickly.

"Oh, Edith!" said the doctor's wife.

Miss Selwyn smiled. She had a very delicate face, pretty at fifty-two; and her smile was very winning.

"We need not borrow trouble, Mary," she said. "But it is better not to let ourselves be surprised."

The doctor rose, and began to walk the room slowly, his face very thoughtful. "He was a beautiful boy," he said, "and he is a handsome man." He went to a cabinet, and took up a later picture of Count Alinori. It was a small photograph that Atalanta had asked for to send home as a companion to the first one. "I think that his wife has been dead several years. And he has a little boy. The count must be toward fifty years of age, Mary."

"Oh! so old as that!" said Mary, and she looked relieved. "Of course she looks upon him as an old man."

"Yes, that is it!" The doctor replaced the photograph. "Nevertheless, I am glad that by this time

their visit to the Alinori is about over. Those Italians are fascinating at any age."

Miss Selwyn went outdoors, and looked across the road. At the side where the house was, only groves and single trees were to be seen. At that part, and behind the hill, was the railroad, visible from the upper windows; and all the woods that once darkened the land had melted away. A little settlement had grown up around the railway station, and farms circled largely round it. But opposite the house the wood called Spruce Mountain was intact. It had narrowed at the northern and southern sides, and the land was cleared at its western edge quite to the base of the small wooded mountain; but the mountain and the strip of land next to the road on the eastern side still held their primeval shadows and wildness, a good mile across.

"Poor boy!" said the lady, and looked wistfully that way, thinking of a time when, but for her timidity, she might have given him comfort.

Miss Selwyn was at Beechlands the autumn before, when Atalanta left home; and she remained there while the doctor and Mary accompanied their daughter and her aunt to New York, where they were to take the steamer. After their departure she took possession of Atalanta's chamber; and as she sat there the first night, in the moonlight of an open window, she heard a bitter sobbing down below. Silvio Heath was lying on the grass there, face down; and there he lay all night, weeping as if his heart would break. He had not come down to bid Atalanta good-by; but he had sent a little gift, and an excuse for not coming. It was a slender gold chain for her watch, and on the card that accompanied it was written: "May every hour be golden."

Miss Selwyn had risen more than once that night to go down and speak some word of comfort, but had not dared to go. Silvio was very reserved.

Now again she longed to go to him. Surely, no one but herself knew. Never had she seen a sign that any one else knew. He would hide his misery, and suffer the more, when speech might be a relief.

She walked slowly down to the road, her heart in a timid flutter that colored her pale cheeks. "Perhaps he will think me intrusive and indelicate," she thought; then, "Perhaps he needs a kind word."

Held back now by one supposition, and now led forward by another, she reached the road, paused there, and then turned into the path. It was a winding path, through an almost tropical forest splendid with autumn color. The dark path was spotted with golden sunshine, and fallen leaves rainbow-colored. There was a little gray stone set up where Atalanta's bear had fallen. Silvio had set it up years before, and painted a white arrow on it.

She walked on with a noiseless step deep into the radiant solitude of the forest; and there she found Silvio.

He was seated on the trunk of a fallen tree, his elbows resting on his knees, and the letter open in his hands, just as he had read it. Now his head was bowed down a little, and he was moaning faintly. He had read it slowly through, crushing out the meaning of each unstudied phrase all leading up to the one that had stabbed his heart through: "I am so happy that I could not be any happier!"

In all the warm, brilliant life about him, his face showed white and cold. He looked as if he were dying.

When he heard Miss Selwyn's step, she was close to him.

He started up, and stood looking at her with a superb stateliness. It was too late to hide the letter, and he did not attempt to hide it. He only stood looking at her, and waiting for the explanation that his eyes seemed to demand. There was something imposing in the stern dignity of this young man, always so modest and quiet.

"Don't be angry with me, Silvio!" she said tremulously. "I thought that you were pained, and — Oh! my poor boy, I know just how hard it is!"

He sat down again, and drooped into his former attitude, but began slowly to fold the letter, and put it into his breast-pocket as tenderly and carefully as if it had not hurt him.

Miss Selwyn seated herself beside him, and looked down at her thin, nervously interlacing hands. "I have always known how you care for her," she said, "and have always held the knowledge sacred. To-day an impulse took me. I thought that it might not offend you to know that I sympathize with you sincerely. We have known each other a good many years, though we have not met often. I hope that you will not look on me as a stranger."

"You are very kind!" said Silvio briefly; and there was nothing forbidding in his voice.

"I sometimes think that sympathy from outside one's own family is more helpful, because we do not take it for granted," she went on.

"I have never asked the sympathy of a living soul!" said Silvio. His tone was constrained, like that of one not accustomed to confide his deeper feelings, yet who is not, perhaps, unwilling to confide.

"The best sympathy is that we do not have to ask for, but which feels our need with an instinctive sen-

sitiveness." She stretched her hand out, without looking at him, and laid it lightly on his arm.

"At first we think that our life is ruined," she whispered faintly.

He burst forth at once. "It isn't Atalanta's fault. I never told her. How I wish that I had! Not that it would have made any difference. Only I wish I had told her. She would have thought of me differently, and remembered me longer."

"She will always remember you."

"It wasn't as if I hoped to marry her," he went on hastily. "I couldn't expect that. But I wanted to live near her, and know how she was, and all that happened to her, and sometimes be of service to her. She could always have been sure of me. She always was. Now I must wait for weeks to know what is happening to her to-day. And here — the place is all spoiled. It used to be beautiful; but everything looks sad. The life has all gone out of it."

His voice failed.

"My poor boy!" murmured the listener.

"It was she who put it into my mind to be an architect," he went on after a pause. "She showed me all the plans for their house, and asked me what sort of house I would like to have. I meant to succeed so as to please her. Now I don't care whether I succeed or not. That song that Fanny Selwyn sang, I think it was written for me:

> "'Twas your smile that made the sunshine,
> 'Twas your voice that made the song.'"

He ended with a faint moan.

What hope could she give him? Only when a girl like Atalanta is disappointed and heart-broken, will she turn willingly to rest upon the tried devotion of

a simple heart, and think it best of all. Till then she must have her hero and her romance. She is not content to be worshipped; she must worship.

"It is hard," she said. "Yet you can still make her honor, if she does not love you. And she does love you as a sister would. You should try to make her proud of you."

"What will she know — there?" he said. "I might waste my life in striving. I might do something that would be considered honorable here, and she never hear of it."

It was plain to Miss Selwyn that he understood Atalanta's letter as she did.

"You could work hard, make a position here, and then sometime you could go there. She would welcome you. She would be so rejoiced to see you."

It seemed as if the weight lifted for a moment, but only to settle again.

"I want to see her now!" he exclaimed passionately, and, starting up, began to walk to and fro before the fallen tree. "I want to see her coming down that path! To remember now that I have seen her coming down there — she, her very self — is like one of the things you read of in the Bible. I feel as though I would like to tear the years in shreds, and get back again to those times! Her hair shone round her head, and she smiled in my face. I can almost hear her say 'Silvio!' Her voice — oh! how I want to hear it! See! I found a track of hers here, and I have kept it!"

He lifted a board and some stones, and Miss Selwyn went to look at what he knelt by. In the moist dark earth was still faintly visible the mark of a small shoe. He covered it in again with jealous care.

"Oh! try to think of something else!" she prayed.

He shook his head; and, bending down again, drew a dry leaf from a pearl-white spot on the ground; and, still pushing aside the leaves and dry black mould, uncovered and took up a mass of spirit-flower, the true sleeping beauty of the woods. At least fifty of the pure rose-white stems stood close together, with the flower-heads curved and drooping in exquisite, sculptured immobility, — alive, yet not alive. They were like something enchanted, and lovely enough to be the waiting-place of infant souls not yet admitted to heaven, but dreaming of heaven.

"I have seen this twice and passed it by," he said. "I did not care to uncover it. But if she were here, I should have carried it to her."

He was about to toss the marvellous thing away, when Miss Selwyn took it from his hand.

"Love was not meant to make us bitter, Silvio, nor willing to destroy the fair things of earth. I tell you, you must try to think of something else."

"I cannot! You do not understand. Please do not talk to me any more about it. You cannot understand, if you think that it is possible for me to forget her. I would not if I could." He held his hand out. "I think that the very lines in the palm of my hand have been shaped by Atalanta, — because I know her!"

Miss Selwyn seated herself again. "Come here, Silvio!" she said with gentle authority.

He came and stood beside her.

"I do not ask you to put any loved image out of your heart," she said, looking down at the spirit-flowers in her lap. "I ask you to shut that image into your heart's inmost shrine, among your holiest thoughts and hopes. Make it an inhabitant of your immortality. When you pray, whisper that name. When

you think of heaven, say 'I hope to meet her there!' But when you go about your every-day affairs, shut the door of the shrine, and do not let that sweet presence be an excuse for discord or discontent. Held so, you cannot lose her forever! You say that I cannot understand." She caught her breath like one who makes a plunge, and a faint blush flickered for a moment in her cheeks. "Listen! Long ago I had to part with a person I had known all my life. It was not his fault. He did not know that I cared; and I knew that he had never thought of me. I remember how cold and numb my hands were, and that my heart seemed to be slowly burning up in my breast. I said nothing to any one. This is my first word and will be my last. I want you to see that I do understand. I went about my duties and was dumb. When the bells rang they sounded to me as if they were broken. I shut in that image as I beg you to do. At first I moaned over it. Then I sighed. And at length I became conscious of a peaceful sweetness there. The pain is all gone now. Where I shut a man's face in, I see the face of an angel. There is no longer any likeness between the two which can trouble me. I see him and love him as I shall see and love him in heaven, — one dear soul more among the blest!"

She joined her hands together, and looked upward.

Silvio, at first rebellious, had colored deeply when he knew what she meant to say, and listened breathlessly, till at her last word he knelt beside her, and felt her hands laid softly on his hair.

"And now the world calls us, my friend!" she said; and he stood up, wiping his eyes, and they went along the path, both of them comforted.

"I mean to make a painting of the spirit-flowers,"

Miss Selwyn said. "What background would be best?"

He took them from her. "Give them their own background: a tree-bole, brown and yellow pine-needles, and black earth." He looked at them thoughtfully. "It is like what you have been telling me," he said: "a fair, heavenly thing that has grown up in darkness!"

They reached the road, and the lady offered her hand kindly. "Come down and try a game of chess with me this evening," she said. "You are already a good player, and will soon excel your teacher."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A DIVORCE.

The day after Count Alinori, with the two ladies under his charge, set out for Venice, Beatrice and the advocate Randini met by appointment in the little capuchin church dedicated to the *Refuge of Sinners*. It was a very small church, in a quiet street, and the lady reached it by a narrow lane running between high garden walls. The gentleman went to the convent at the same time to see the father guardian, and, after a long conversation, passed into the church with him by a private way.

No other person being present, the three went into the sacristy, and locked the door.

It was nearly an hour before they came out again; and then it was time to close the church for the evening. The monk went to let Beatrice out, and lock the door behind her.

"You will come at six o'clock, Fra Calisto?" she said, pausing in the vestibule.

"At six o'clock, Madama."

He spoke with a troubled, not to say frightened, air, and made haste to lock the door. Returning then to the chapel, he re-entered the convent with the advocate Randini.

Beatrice hastened to Palazzo Mattei to say a word to her friend. The errand was a brief one, and she called the signora out to the landing, where they whispered together a few minutes.

"Mind that you do not fail!" she said, as they parted at the head of the stairs.

The Signora Mattei stood looking after her as she tripped down lightly, and disappeared around the wall without looking behind her. Her not looking back for another greeting, when she might have known that her friend was still standing there, showed pre-occupation. The Signora hardly understood Beatrice of late. Something seemed to be going on of which she was not informed. Was it possible that Bice was going to procure a divorce from Don Leonardo, and go away to America? She had once declared that she had half a mind to.

The Signora Mattei was not alone in thinking that something unusual was occupying the mind of Madama Alinori: Ventura, the cook, and Nina, the maid, were watching curiously to see why she had gone down to sleep in the chamber that had been occupied by the American signorina, and left an old woman to guard Don Leonardo; and Don Leonardo himself was more intensely aware than any one else that something was the matter. He asked no questions; but he looked at his wife attentively whenever she did not seem to observe him; and he studied the problem in fear and trembling.

She came two or three times a day to make some necessary inquiry, or to see that he was comfortable; but she never seated herself, and she never made any conversation with him beyond the errand which had brought her to the room. She stood as calm as a statue, and looked at him. After nightfall he saw her no more. He felt himself grow cold as she stood there looking at him, as from an immeasurable distance, and speaking in those quiet, low tones, as people speak when there is death in the house.

He felt as though he were a prisoner, and she his jailer.

One day she came nearer, and laid a small crucifix on the table at his elbow, going out without uttering a word.

His pale blue eyes, wildly distended, followed her to the door, then turned askance on the crucifix. What did it mean? You put a crucifix in the hands of a dying person!

The next time she came, he made an effort to break through the spell that froze him.

"My cravat has come loose," he said grumblingly, then instantly repented; for he was afraid to have her touch him.

"Nina will tie it when she comes," said Beatrice.

In very fear he tried to anger her.

"What has come over you?" he asked. "Why do you stay outside? Have you got a lover out there?"

"I have no lover," she answered quietly.

He had just eaten his dinner when she came in after her visit to the capuchin church and Palazzo Mattei. A bright fire of olive twigs crackled on the hearth, and a bright lamp illumined the old man's figure as he sat there in his arm-chair, with a tumbler of wine and a plate of walnuts beside him.

"Fra Calisto is coming to say mass to-morrow morning," Beatrice said, pausing at the other side of the hearth. "He will come early enough to hear your confession."

"Who said that I wanted to confess?" he asked.

"No one. But there is the opportunity; and you may not have another for a good while."

He said nothing.

"He will come at six o'clock," she added.

He made no reply, and she left him.

The *frate* came the next morning, and, when Don Leonardo was led to the chapel, asked him if he wished to confess.

"I don't want to confess," said the old man testily.

Beatrice was called, and mass was said. Don Leonardo was terrified to see that she did not go to communion. What had she been to church for, if not to confess! The mass was, then, for him!

He was led back to his room again. A little fire had been kindled, though the morning sun shone in, and his breakfast was unusually good that day. Besides the coffee and roll he usually ate, Nina brought him a cup of broth, and said that Madama wished him to drink it, as the day was cold.

He stretched his hand to take it, then drew it back with a start. "Who prepared it?" he asked, eying the girl suspiciously.

"Ventura, of course!" she said; then laughed. "Are you afraid, Don Leonardo? Fra Calisto is drinking some. I will taste of this, if you wish."

He continued looking at her, and she laughingly poured out a part of the broth, and drank it. He then drank the rest.

After having eaten his breakfast, the monk returned to the chapel, and, seating himself there, began saying his rosary. Beatrice went down to the large *sala*, and walked up and down, keeping a watch on the street. She had sent Nina and Cesare out to the villa on some errand.

About eight o'clock the advocate Randini came up the street, and turned in at the *portone* of Palazzo Alinori; and at the same time the Signora Mattei appeared from the lane opposite, and crossed over.

Beatrice went herself to admit them, and led them to the chapel, where they found Fra Calisto. She left

them there together a few minutes while she went to see to the house. There was no one but the cook, and the old woman who served Don Leonardo. She sent the old woman home, and returned to the chapel.

"My friends," she said, "before assisting at an interview between Don Leonardo and myself, I wish you to witness one, yourselves unseen. It is necessary. I do not wish to omit any proof. Reverend father, I did not tell you where the paper you saw yesterday was secreted. I found it hidden in the cushion of a chair in my *salon*. It was Don Leonardo's manner which drew my attention to that chair, and made me search it. I substituted a piece of blank paper. He does not know of this substitution. Now, I wish to prove, by his own conduct, that I have told you the truth, and that it was he who secreted the paper there. Come with me and stand behind the *portiera* till I call you, or till it is necessary that you should enter. Watch him closely."

They followed her in silence, and remained behind the *portiera* while she entered.

"I thought that you might like to go to communion this morning," she said; and, taking the crimson chair, moved it up before the fire, and seated herself in it so that the side of the paper was toward the door.

Don Leonardo had watched her with a lowering, distrustful gaze from the moment of her entrance.

"You are getting pious!" he said dryly.

"I am on the high-road to piety," she answered, looking, not at him, but at the dying fire. "I am studying justice. That is the foundation stone."

"I hope that Fra Calisto will lay that to heart!" she thought.

"I've always heard that charity is the foundation stone," observed Don Leonardo, surprised into polemics.

"Justice is charity to the greatest number," said Beatrice; and as she spoke, by a natural, careless movement, dropped her hand to the cushion of her chair, clasping the edge of it.

Don Leonardo's face changed, and he made an uneasy movement. "What did you drag that chair up to the fire for?" he asked nervously. "The fire will fade it. Besides, the foot isn't strong. If you must sit in a brocade chair" — his irritation increasing — "go and take the whole one."

"Oh! there isn't fire enough to hurt this," she answered absently, still feeling of the cushion. "But, as I was saying, justice before charity, that is, the charity which we see and hear most of. There is a charity which is above all. I have never in all my life seen a single instance of it."

Don Leonardo did not reply. He was watching with ill concealed excitement that hand on the chair cushion. Beatrice did not seem to observe his expression, nor that he made a slight motion as if to rise from his chair, stretching his hand toward his cane, a knotty olive stick.

"If there were more justice in the world, there would be less need of what is called charity," she went on dreamily, her eyes fixed on a small flame in the fire-place that flickered and went out, rose again, flickered, and went out, to rise yet again. "The heavenly charity is another thing. That transfigures. What we call charity is a robbing of Peter to pay Paul, or it is a patch we put on our lives lest God and man should see how ragged they are."

While speaking, she turned her head aside, and

looked down at her hand as though she felt something in the cushion.

Don Leonardo grasped his cane, and leaned forward, swaying a little from side to side in his agitation. If he had been less pre-occupied, he might have observed a movement in the curtain over the door opposite him. The Signora Mattei, crouched down, was looking in through the legs of a table at one side, and in the middle, the advocate Randini looked over Fra Calisto's head, their faces almost visible in the parting of the curtain.

"What is it?" said Beatrice with a languid curiosity, half to herself. "There's something sharp in the wool of the cushion," half addressing Don Leonardo. "It seems to be a stiff folded paper. How careless they were!" She rose and began to examine the cushion, warily keeping a sidelong watch on Don Leonardo. "It must be taken out. I wonder it hasn't made a hole in the brocade."

"Let the chair alone!" cried the old man violently. "You are always fussing about something."

"But it's better to get the thing out," she said, appearing to see nothing strange in his manner. And, indeed, he had the habit of being either surly or violent with her on a trivial provocation. "I will go and get my new scissors. I can rip a little bit, and then sew it up again."

She retreated as Don Leonardo rose and approached her, and hastened away, walking with a rather heavy step through the corridor. In passing the curtain, she whispered one word: "Watch!"

Don Leonardo stood near the chair, bent, and leaning on his cane, his head a little turned aside, and his mouth open, as he listened to her retreating steps. When the door at the end of the corridor closed, he

precipitated himself on to the chair, turned it over, and fumbled feverishly under the cushion. His breath came in gasps as he searched, and his face was crimson.

Beatrice gave him time before coming back.

"Where?" she whispered, pausing an instant outside the curtain.

"Left waistcoat pocket," the Mattei answered in her ear.

"I can make a little hole that will do no harm," Beatrice said, entering.

A hoarse, cackling laugh greeted her. Don Leonardo had returned to his chair in the corner. "I have saved you the trouble," he said. "It was nothing but a straw doubled up. I have thrown it into the fire."

"Oh! very well!" she replied, and seated herself again. "Now I wish to talk with you. Do you recollect a paper you wrote for me the day we were married? You declared in it that my mother was an innocent woman, as far as you knew."

"I never made any such declaration!" said Don Leonardo promptly. He seemed to be in high spirits all at once.

Beatrice looked at him with some surprise.

"Perhaps you may recollect better a second one in which you confessed that you could not say my mother might not have been the lawful wife of Paulo Giorgini."

"I never wrote nor said any such thing," declared the old man firmly.

He put himself a little on his guard in speaking, for Beatrice left her chair, and approached the fireplace. She threw in a handful of vine and olive twigs, and brushed up the hearth. "Do try to recol-

lect," she said persuasively, standing with the brush in her hand. "It can't be that your memory is failing so. Don't you recollect that" — she stooped to replace the brush, and in doing so hit his cane, and pushed it out of his hand; and in the same instant, put her hand out, as if afraid of falling. Before he knew, she had snatched the paper from his pocket, and sprung backward. She laughed, and held it high above her head, still retreating.

The old man's face was terrible to see. There was a froth of rage on his lips. He rose slowly, with the cane in his hand as a weapon, and seemed to be calculating distances.

"Will you own the truth about the other papers if I give you this?" she asked.

"Yes!" he answered, slowly and warily advancing to place himself between her and the door.

"Say that you did give me the two papers, and that they were true," she said, placing a chair between them.

"I gave them to you, and they were true," he said hoarsely, still following her as she retreated, and showing scarcely a sign of lameness.

"You know nothing against my mother?" she said. "See! tell the truth, and I give you the paper."

"I know nothing against her!" he answered, and half raised his hand, holding the cane while he stretched the other for the paper she held out.

Beatrice had been pushed into a corner of the room where a tall mirror hung. Her watchful eyes saw his intention and her own chance.

"Beware! there are visitors!" she whispered. Then aloud: —

"Oh! good-morning" —

He did not allow her to finish. He believed her

visitors were a ruse to escape. She had only time to stoop and rush under his arm as he snatched the paper, and struck at her with the heavy stick. Missing her head, the blow fell with a splintering crash on the mirror.

"Oh! signora, you are welcome!" said Beatrice, a little out of breath. "Please enter, Fra Calisto! I am glad to see you, Signor Avvocato! Pray excuse the confusion. As you see, we have met with an accident."

Don Leonardo looked round, forgot to return the salutations of the three who entered, and went back very lame and shaking, to his arm-chair. Before seating himself, he threw the paper into the fire, and watched it burn. Then he saw that a half-circle had been formed, the three new-comers drawn out opposite him, and Beatrice forming the key-stone of the curve. It was evident that they did not intend to ignore him, as visitors sometimes did after the first compliments were made; and, also, that they would take no notice of the broken mirror.

He looked to make sure that the last fold of the paper was trembling in a black cinder, then turned his eyes to the silent circle before him. He understood perfectly that something was in preparation for him. The air of deliberation and solemnity was unmistakable. He rested his hands on his cane, and sat staring at them, like an animal at bay.

Beatrice produced a pocket-book, and unfolded two papers. They were the two that he had written for her. She read one after the other, pausing to ask at the end of each if it was true.

"It is true," he answered, and thought of the black cinders quivering before their eyes. "If they could only know!" his thought was; and he felt inclined to laugh.

It was probable that they had long since forgotten those old stories which connected his name with Beatrice Lanciani's; and if not, in any case it became him to speak decently of his wife's mother. Compared to the danger which he had just escaped, this inquest seemed to him trivial in the extreme. Beatrice was always getting up a scene of some kind. She was nothing if not dramatic.

Having received his last response, she rose and gave a third paper to the advocate Randini, then remained standing, her hands resting on the back of the chair that she had occupied. She stood there erect, her eyes shining, her head uplifted. Her form seemed to dilate.

"Read!" she said with authority.

The advocate had evidently seen the paper before; for his eyes were fixed on the old man opposite him while he unfolded it, and paused a moment before reading.

A frightened look came into Don Leonardo's eyes, that grew wild as he heard the first words of the document read in a clear and emphatic voice.

It was a record of the marriage of Paulo Conte Giorgini with Beatrice Lanciani, forty years before, with the names of three witnesses, one of whom was Leonardo dei Conti Alinori.

"It is false! It is a forgery!" the old man screamed, half rising from his chair.

Beatrice laid her hand on the back of the crimson chair, and looked at him significantly. Then she pointed to the fire with a faint smile. She was scarcely aware of the Signora Mattei, who was throwing her arms around her, with an excited "Oh! Bice, my dear Bice!"

Fra Calisto went to stand by Don Leonardo, and exhort him to be calm.

"It is false!" he cried, and sank back into his chair again. Beatrice's pantomime revealed all. She had fooled him completely!

"The document is authentic," the advocate said. "It has been compared with the book from which it was torn, and the signatures with other signatures of the same persons. The torn leaf fits the book, has the page that corresponds, and the same paper; and there is another marriage recorded on it which was copied into the book, while that of Paulo and Beatrice was omitted. There is no doubt about the document. I have shown it to two eminent lawyers, and to an adept in penmanship. Rest assured, the record is valid."

Don Leonardo made a strange movement. He turned slightly, and looked over his own shoulder, not at anything, but as if he had been slowly twisted by some physical force.

"Don Leonardo," said Fra Calisto's soothing voice, "Madama Beatrice has no wish to make any scandal. As your wife, she wishes to shield you. Perhaps," turning to her, "she will now tell you clearly what her wishes and intentions are."

"I wish him to confess the whole truth before these witnesses," she said briefly.

"It is a trap of hers," he cried out in a fury. "She wants to get rid of me with the hope of marrying Francesco. She is in love with Francesco, and jealous of the American." He poured out revilings and accusations without mercy and without decency.

Beatrice did not interrupt him. Pale and with downcast eyes, she stood erect, and answered not a word.

It was the advocate Randini who put a stop to the tirade. "That will do!" he said with authority. "You are injuring your own cause."

"You will not confess?" asked Beatrice coldly, as if all that had passed since she last spoke were irrelevant.

Don Leonardo glared at her in silence, his fingers working.

"Don Leonardo," said the monk, laying a hand on his shoulder, "calm yourself. Explain to us, and we will promise secrecy. Any one may be tempted to sin. Madama has no wish to make any scandal. And, remember, you also profit by her elevation. As Madama's husband, you also inherit."

"You think so!" she exclaimed haughtily, turning toward the monk. "You think that I will let him cross the threshold of the Giorgini! It is true that I have no wish to expose his crimes to the public; but once my business done with him to-day, I will never see him more!"

"Madama," said the monk reprovingly, "mercy becomes a Christian; and a woman should forgive a husband who makes restitution. I think that if you would agree to say that the paper was found in some other place, where nothing will connect it with your husband, Don Leonardo will then explain all that is necessary, and own to his signature."

"If you will tell the truth now before these witnesses," Beatrice said, "you shall be left in peace henceforth. The matter shall never be made public."

He watched her with a sidelong look while she spoke, his eyes contracting. Hate looked out at her from them.

The advocate leaned forward. "You acknowledge that you were one of the witnesses to the marriage, do you not?" he asked.

"No!" said Don Leonardo, staring at Beatrice.

She seemed by a quick movement to shake off her last restraint of patience.

"Tell me," she said, "what was in that letter which you wrote to my father, and signed with the name of the advocate Randini? He went out at night, believing that he had an appointment with his friend; and he never came back."

"What!" exclaimed the advocate. "What are you saying, Beatrice?"

She did not answer him. She was looking at Don Leonardo, whose face had become purple, and taken on a strange, bewildered expression.

"What did Sopraciglia, the assassin, do for the hundred *scudi* you gave him?" she went on, her finger pointing at him. "It was to him that you gave the forged letter, and it was with him that my father went out that night."

There was a moment of silence. All stood looking at the miserable old man, who stared at them, and seemed unmoved.

"Oh! Don Leonardo," exclaimed the priest. "If you are indeed so guilty, confess now, as you value your own soul!"

He made no reply, only stared obstinately.

"Who killed Giacomo's father after he was seen speaking privately to me?" Beatrice asked, her finger still pointing. "And why was he killed?"

Again a silence. And then a horrible thing happened.

While they all looked at him, his head gave a little jerk, and — how can it be expressed? It was as though some large faded leaf of autumn should suddenly bleach white and curl up in a great heat. His eyes contracted, his features grew white, and withered

up together. His whole face writhed itself out of recognition in a moment.

Then, before the cry which had risen to the lips of each had been uttered, he stretched out his arms, from which they recoiled, swayed to and fro, and fell headlong into their midst.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

FLOATING.

Mrs. Elder and her party set out on their journey on one of the very last days of October; and it was the eve of All Saints when they arrived at Venice in the midst of one of the most radiant of sunsets.

The count was to lodge with a friend who lived down toward the public gardens; and they took leave of each other at the railway station, promising to meet in the evening.

They had but just finished their dinner when he came in.

"Ladies," he said, "I have told my gondolier to wait. Can you resist such an evening? Have you seen it? The air is like the breath of a sleeping infant, and the sky — look at it!"

"Oh! Elise," murmured Atalanta, "isn't it too bad! Some people my cousin knows have sent word that they were coming in this evening, count, and there is no escape."

"You could go without me," Mrs. Elder said in English. "No one will know, if we do not tell. It isn't as though he were a stranger."

Atalanta shook her head. "Father told me never to go out without being accompanied by a lady."

"Perhaps I could spare Batista. Frank can open the door."

"Oh! no," Atalanta said decisively. "Besides, Batista isn't a lady. I cannot go."

"I cannot go; and I am so sorry!" she said to the count, who had divined the meaning of their conversation. She drew the curtain aside, and looked out at the full brightness of moonlight shining on the water, and on the gliding black boats and gondolas, and touching along the profile of the palaces opposite. How cruel and impertinent seemed those social proprieties which forbade her to enjoy the full beauty of the scene! She longed passionately to go out and float in light and shadow over those enchanted waters, slip into the dark *rios*, where nothing would be heard save the soft splash of the oar in the black wave, then out where each stroke would waken a sparkling as of fire; to see Desdemona's palace blanch to ivory in the moon, and the *campanili* melt in the radiant sky; and, above all, to hear what word the man by her side would find to make that fairy-like scene yet more rapturous, — what word, or what tone of voice, setting the soft thrilling climax on that Venetian night.

And she must lose it for a scruple, and stay in with the curtains down, and listen to small-talk! Elise said that she could go, and she was under the protection of Elise. Would her father have forbidden, if he had known just how it would be? It was true that she knew Count Alinori well, and had been an inmate of his family all summer.

A slight movement, a breath drawn in audibly, an undefined stir in the figure beside her, — all went to convey an eager interrogation, that scarcely needed a glance to interpret its meaning. The count had understood that she was debating the subject, and scarcely doubted the result. She would go.

"No, I cannot go," she said, looking at him regretfully. "But, oh! how I want to go!"

"Then you shall have a little serenade," he said.

"And you will go to bed early. You are tired, are you not?"

He took leave; and Atalanta excused herself, and went up to her chamber. It was the largest chamber in the house, and had a balcony on the canal. The count's gondola had but just left the steps, and she watched it glide out on to the silvery water, and down toward the lagoon, till the great bulk of an eastern steamship hid the moving speck from her sight.

Then she sat there dreaming, and all her dream was of him.

"Father says that only in Italy do people know how to get all the joy out of life," she thought; "and that only in Italy are there pleasures for old people. Why should we not have a place in Italy, and live here a part of the time, and stay here when we are old? We are rich enough. Dear Beechlands! It seems a sin not to be satisfied with it; yet I cannot be now. I am like Proserpine." She smiled faintly, yet with some perception of tragedy in the situation. "I have eaten the three pomegranate seeds; and now I can never be content to spend my life there."

The moon wore southward; and there was a sound of music coming over the water. It sounded far away like three violins in tune, making the air tremble with delight; and then, it was three voices that seemed as if they might have come from one soul, so perfectly were they harmonized; and nearer yet the chords grew distinct; and then, it was a song that told of moonlight on lagoon and *riviera* and a gondola, where two floated alone, with heaven shut into their hearts.

The gondola stopped at a little distance, and song and pause alternated. One song was like cymbals, swift and ringing. They sang of their country, pouring out words, half song, half speech, in a recitative

most fit for noble thoughts: and then a farewell, phrase after phrase dropping slowly like tears. Lastly came a soft "good-night;" and, as they sang it, the gondola moved with a liquid rustling toward the house, till it stopped beneath the balcony, and the song became a whisper sweet enough to have been brought on some wandering wind from paradise.

The breath suspended on her lips, Atalanta bent over the balustrade to hear that last note

> "——— that trembled on the ether,
> So slender was the thread that held
> Silence and song together."

She held an armful of loose roses that some admirer had sent to greet her return; and, when there seemed to be silence, she dropped one after another in a quick succession. The soft, muffled sound of their falling on the carpet of the open gondola was like the quick, strong throbs of a heart.

No one spoke. With a half audible liquid stir the gondola glided out into the moonlight, a man standing at the prow with his head uncovered. Between him and the gondolier three figures were seated, and they also removed their hats.

In Italy, when a gentleman lifts his hat to a lady, his male companions, even when not of a class from which etiquet is expected, scrupulously follow his example.

Each of them had a rose in his button-hole; and, as they were roses of a rare beauty and fragrance, it might be expected that they would find their way to some fairer hand.

The count fastened one to the high prow. "Guido," he said to the gondolier, "whenever I see you with a

rose at the prow, I will prefer you to all other gondoliers."

Atalanta sighed with a delicious contentment as she closed her window. It was the witching night of all the year, All Hallows Eve, and she seemed to have had a serenade from wandering spirits. "He is so good!" she thought, as she dropped asleep.

Count Alinori's presence in Venice, and his devotion to their party, was a decided social advantage to the Elders, who immediately found themselves, partly by chance and partly by his patronage, on the tentative outskirts of a more exclusive society than any they had hitherto known. He watched Ann Eliza with a good deal of amusement in these circumstances. The lofty calm with which she ignored a third-class person in the presence of a second-class, and the second in turn when a first-class person was available, was something imposing. She neither acknowledged nor saw any impropriety in the proceeding. It was simply fitting. She watched the dress, speech, manner and looks of her new acquaintances, and copied them at once to the best of her power. She smiled heroically at the snub which greeted her too enthusiastic advance, and did not retreat an inch farther than she was pushed. If beckoned forward, she obeyed thankfully. The count privately declared to his friends that she showed a wonderful lack of sensitiveness, and an equally wonderful amount of common sense. She wanted to get on, and she was taking the right way. She would not disgrace them; for she showed her appreciation of the fact that fine society is necessarily exclusive, that its exclusiveness is the instinct of self-preservation, and its pretensions not even so high as what is virtually conceded to it by the jealous army of unsuccessful besiegers.

"I do not know what to make of her," said one of his friends, laughing. "At one moment she is as loftily affable as royalty itself, and has, upon my word, as grand an air as a lady can have; and the next she makes some blunder that my laundress wouldn't make. However, there is no doubt about her complexion and hair; and as to those blue eyes, they would obtain her admittance anywhere. St. Peter himself will ask no questions when she presents herself at the gate of Paradise."

"And *Madamigella?*" asked the count, desirous, yet reluctant, to hear her spoken of; for his interlocutor was a man of taste.

The gentleman bowed his head. "That is another affair. The donna Atalanta is a noble *damigella*, and Venetian, too. She has the old Venetian hair. And what velvet eyes! That is quite another thing. My dear Checco, at a certain altitude there are no walls. Our social divisions are only *tra-mezzi*. A delicate and superior culture is but a superficial aspiration toward a delicate and superior nature."

"After all, she is not so entirely a child of nature," the count said, only half pleased. "She is well educated, well read, and good-mannered."

"Undoubtedly!" was the prompt response. "I only meant to say that she has the metal as well as the finish."

The ladies were equally benevolent in their reception of Atalanta, and, as the count had predicted, her simple graces were studied as a new art.

"She looks upon the grandeur of our palaces as if she were a fairy right out of a flower," said one; "and when she asks me the proper etiquet of some occasion, I feel as though I were instructing an angel in the lower usages of earth."

A party of ladies and gentlemen were walking in the Papadopoli garden, meeting and separating in the pleasant paths, pausing and changing company by seeming chance, now in shade, now in the mellow afternoon sun.

"Oh! if I had only been born in Venice!" Mrs. Elder exclaimed rapturously. "Atalanta, think of having Venice for one's native place! It must give a certain distinctive character."

"I would prefer Beechlands," Atalanta replied rather coldly.

"So would I!" said Count Alinori; and they laughed.

"But is there nothing of ours that you would have for your country?" a gentleman asked.

"Yes, surely. I would have your spontaneous grace — minus something; your enthusiastic appreciation of all fair things, just as it is; and your warm hearts — minus something. Pardon me! I did not think till you asked me."

"You doubt our friendships?"

"Oh, no!" she said. "My father says that he would accept Italian foes to have Italian friends."

"What, then, is it?" asked the count, as they walked on, side by side.

"It is that all seem friends, whether they are or not. Indifference takes the form of friendship, and deceives without, perhaps, meaning to. One can never be sure."

They were going out of the gate, and these two last. The count paused a moment under the arch. "Be sure of me, Signorina Atalanta!" he said with emotion. "I will never fail you. Be sure of me!"

They entered their waiting gondolas just as another approached the landing; and, as they steered out into

the canal, the other turned and followed them. It followed at a little distance till only the party from Mrs. Elder's remained, then came alongside of them; and to their surprise the advocate Randini looked out of the window to salute them.

"I have been to see you, Checco," he said, "and they told me where you had gone. I hope that I am not interrupting any appointment."

"Oh, no! Follow us to Mrs. Elder's door, and I will get in with you."

"But, remember, that we are to see you at the theatre," Mrs. Elder said. "And if the Signor Advocate will come to our box with you, we shall be happy to see him."

"Thanks! I am too old to go out much in the evening. I will not prevent Checco's going: but I hope that you will forgive me if I make him late. I will release him as soon as possible. I have some business affairs to talk over."

"What is the matter?" the count asked as soon as they were out in the canal.

"Wait till we get home," said the advocate.

"Something has happened!"

"Yes; Don Leonardo is dead. He had a stroke, and lived only a few hours."

"Did he speak?" asked the count, excitedly.

"He confessed, Checco!"

"My God!" exclaimed the count, sinking back.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

OUT OF THE NEST.

When they entered the house, Mrs. Elder followed Atalanta up to her chamber.

"I have something to tell you," she said with an air of importance.

"Well!"

"Do you know what the count was saying to Frank in the office this morning, when they talked an hour together?"

"Of course not! What was it?" She spoke with eager interest.

Mrs. Elder smiled complacently. "He wishes Frank to write to Uncle James for permission — guess!"

Atalanta's hand was pressed to her heart, which had begun to flutter. "Speak quickly!" she said.

"Permission to ask your hand in marriage."

Atalanta stood a moment, her color changing, then went to kneel before her bed, hiding her face there.

Mrs. Elder waited till she came back, looking frightened, and with very red cheeks; then continued her story.

"He said everything that could be expected. He was very much afraid that his age might be objected to. He is very much in love with you. Nothing was said of my speaking to you; but, of course, it is tacitly understood that you are to know what is going on. Frank has already sent the letter. We knew that you

like him so much that you would not actually refuse him, even if you did not accept him at once."

"He must not speak to me about it!" Atalanta said, trembling. "Don't let him speak to me about it! Oh! I wish that mother were here!"

Mrs. Elder took her hands, charmed with the *rôle* which she found herself called upon to play. "He will be just as he has been in the past, till Uncle James's answer comes. You can appear as though you knew nothing. It is really a great match, Atalanta. As Count Alinori, he is not to be despised; though he would be no great catch for a girl with money and beauty. But when he comes into the Giorgini property, he will be one of the first men in Tuscany. I have seen just what was going to happen, though I have said nothing about it."

Ann Eliza glowed with pride.

"I hope he does not think that I knew!" Atalanta exclaimed.

"Certainly not!"

"I wouldn't have him think so for the world!" she went on, looking at her cousin's wife with doubting, troubled eyes. She could not fail to see that Ann Eliza's character had developed in a rather unpleasant way since her residence abroad.

"He expressly said that he perceived you were entirely unconscious of his wishes," Mrs Elder declared.

It was rather late when they reached the theatre, and Count Alinori was not in sight. Atalanta breathed more freely when she was seated in the box, and still did not see him. She was half angry with and wholly afraid of him. Why could he not have left things as they were! She had thought that he was a friend, and behold! he was an egotist. To be sure, it was a compliment. She was not good enough for him. But,

nevertheless, she wished, or thought she wished, that he had not spoken. And then, thrust into this trembling mood, wedgelike, came bright glimpses of delight. He must not speak of marriage to her; but, oh! now she would never lose sight of him.

"Where can the count be!" Mrs. Elder wondered more than once; and she even sent her husband out to search the corridors and see if perhaps he might not be seeking them.

"Oh! he will find us fast enough, when he comes," her husband said. "You told me that the advocate wanted to see him on business."

Atalanta became uneasy. Why did he not come? She hoped that nothing unpleasant had happened. She had studied just how she should behave; and now he gave her no chance to practise her new-found prudence. Suppose that something had happened; that, perhaps, his gondola had overset! Those little steamboats made such rollers; and he might have hurried his gondolier, being late, and they might have overset in the great wave. Or they might even have tried to cut across the path of a steamer, and been run over. She turned cold at the image of Count Alinori struggling in the water, and overwhelmed.

Atalanta was not a particularly imaginative girl; and she had been taught not to torment herself needlessly; yet she was almost on the point of begging her cousin to go in search of the count, and find him at all costs, when the door of the box opened quietly, and he entered.

She turned quickly to the stage with a mental thanksgiving and a thrill of joy; and, for the first time in their acquaintance, affected not to see him.

Later in the evening she recollected this terror of some evil threatening him, or already fallen, which

had so strangely overcome her at the very time when he was hastening to her, and thinking of her.

He seated himself behind her, exchanging only a bow with the others. She half turned her head, and bowed without seeing his face, then devoted herself to the stage again. She had time to wonder a little that he did not come farther forward, or try to speak a word to her, before she became aware that Mrs. Elder had moved back, and that the three were holding a whispered conference.

Mrs. Elder touched her arm. "Would you mind going home now, Atalanta?" she whispered. "The play is almost over."

"Certainly not!" she answered readily; and, turning, confronted Count Alinori.

In that instant, herself was forgotten. "What is the matter?" she asked in affright. For his face was pale; and the eyes that met hers were full of anguish.

"Don Leonardo is dead!" Mrs. Elder whispered. "Take Frank's arm, and we will get out quietly. The count is going home with us."

They went home in almost perfect silence. To Mrs. Elder's inquiries, the count had replied in such a stifled voice and with such an evident effort, that she waited for him to tell his story in his own way.

"I am sorry to have disturbed your pleasure," he said when they had reached the drawing-room; and as he took Atalanta's cloak from her, he bent his head a little, and smiled into her face, a faint smile more sad than tears, and as tender as heaven. He had seen that she looked distressed.

"My uncle's" — he gave a certain start that was like a shiver — "Don Leonardo's death was very sudden," he said at once. "He had a stroke of paralysis,

and died almost immediately. The funeral has already taken place."

He looked to see where Atalanta would seat herself; and when she sank into a small sofa, he took a chair opposite her. Mr. and Mrs. Elder always occupied arm-chairs, as more stately and official. The three looked anxiously at him, wondering a little at seeing him so moved at the death of a disagreeable old man for whom he had never displayed any warmer feeling than the dutiful regard of a nephew.

"I am very sorry for you, count," Mrs. Elder said. "But, of course, a man of that age could not have lived much longer, at the best. Besides, infirm as he was, his life could not have been a very happy one. I suppose his wife is very much distressed."

She uttered the last words rather stiffly. Her private opinion was that Don Leonardo's wife would not be at all distressed.

"Poor Madama!" said Atalanta. "How sad for her to be alone at such a time! I wish I could see her, and try to comfort her a little. She was very sweet to me."

"Beatrice has gone to stay with her friend, the Signora Mattei," the count said, looking attentively at Atalanta.

"Oh! I recollect that your people sometimes go away from home a little while in such circumstances," she said. "But then it is the more sad when they return."

"Beatrice will not return," the count said.

"Not return!" echoed Mrs. Elder.

The count rose. He felt himself suffocating. He had an impulse to pace the room while making his explanation, but checked it. Resting his arms on the back of his chair, he looked down at the cushion.

"My uncle's widow no longer needs the shelter of my poor roof," he said. "Certain papers, apparently authentic ones, have been found which confer upon her the title of Countess Giorgini, with the Giorgini estates."

"And you?" cried Ann Eliza sharply.

He bowed to her with sarcastic ceremony.

"I remain Count Alinori of Ombra, at your service."

Mrs. Elder rose excitedly. "It is a shame! What are these papers, which no one has ever heard of before, and which are discovered while you are away? I hope that you are going to investigate the matter thoroughly, Count Alinori."

She spoke with a certain authority, as he jealously felt; and it cut him to the quick. He understood at once that it was as much the rights of her husband's cousin, as his own, that she was defending. His face became crimson, and he spoke with a slight coldness in answering.

"Madam, the proofs are crushing. I have argued and examined the whole matter with the advocate Randini. Of course I shall examine the case. I shall return home to-morrow. But I have no hope of any other conclusion."

He resumed his seat.

"And you lose all?" she exclaimed.

"Everything!"

"And she has the whole absolutely?"

"She has absolutely the whole."

"Oh!" Mrs. Elder fell back tragically into her arm-chair, and closed her eyes.

Atalanta was looking at the count with a soft trouble and compassion in her face.

"But you do not need it," she said gently. "You

have a title, a palace, and a villa. And Madama," —she stopped.

There had been certain scenes between her and Beatrice which she could not refer to. Beatrice had told her the story of her unfortunate parents, and her own miserable life, concealing only what related to Count Alinori. "I want you to understand and pity me," she had said, "because you love me."

And Atalanta loved her.

"Beatrice will be so happy," she said. "Of course she will make Cesare her heir. And have you not enough? Your place is beautiful."

"Madamigella," said the count, blushing crimson, "I am poor."

He bowed his head down. She had given him the final blow. He had been saying to himself that he must give her up, or at least offer to do so; but a faint hope had lurked in his heart that his resignation might not be accepted. Mrs. Elder's plainly shown angry disappointment had given him a shock; but he had received now a still greater one from Atalanta's calm indifference.

"I ought to have jumped into the lagoon, instead of going to the theatre," he thought.

Mr. Francis Elder crossed his legs and cleared his throat delicately. He always did both when he was about to inquire into any subject. The count cut the inquiry short by a sudden outburst.

"If it had never been promised to me!" he exclaimed. "If I had not been brought up to believe it mine! I have had opportunities to better my fortune. But I have no taste for speculation and enterprise; and it was only a question of waiting a few years. It did not seem even worth while to economize what I had; and I have been spending capital

as well as income. Pardon me!" He looked at Mr. and Mrs. Elder, and not at Atalanta. "I would not trouble you with these details, if I had not already, and only to-day, made a very different statement. Of course I must withdraw my proposal. I hoped, perhaps presumptuously, that what I could offer with myself might cover my own defects, and that" — his voice failed a little. Coldness and rejection seemed to press upon him from every side. He felt the sting of a slight from his inferiors, and coldness where he gave love. "But no matter about my hopes," he resumed more steadily. "I see that they are in vain. I have nothing to offer."

"Count Alinori," said Atalanta, rising, and taking a step toward him, "will you please to tell me what the proposal was, and what the hopes were, which you now renounce?"

What was it that he saw in her face as he turned quickly to her? Pride, certainly; but pride in what? And there was pride in the tone of her voice and the lifting of her head.

"Madamigella," he said, "I loved you, and wished to make you my wife."

"And you wish it no longer?"

"I wish for it with all my heart. But how can I hope for it? I am ruined!"

The manner in which she went to his side was beautiful. It was as a child sometimes comes to one, slowly, afraid, yet wishing to come, and, reaching, subsides with a little flutter — as she did, when the count rose and took her hand. She stood there trembling beside him.

"Atalanta," he said, "will you not speak? Will you not speak? I cannot believe!"

"If my father and mother consent, and if you

wish"—she said tremulously, and stopped, out of breath.

"Child!" he exclaimed. "Dear angel! it is only pity. You are sacrificing yourself."

She looked about as if in search of some one to whom she could fly, and found only him. "No, it is not pity. For when I think of losing you, it seems as though my heart would break."

What word it was that Count Alinori breathed out in a full, strong breath, as he bent to kiss the hand he held, not even Atalanta heard.

Mrs. Elder interposed with dignity. "Atalanta, I wouldn't say any more now. This can all be settled afterward."

"It can all be settled afterward, yes." Atalanta looked at the count. She had not looked at him before. "I want to say good-by to-morrow. Come for just one moment; and do not look so pale. You will write to my cousin, and I will read the letter. Don't feel so bad about the money. In some way I think it will all come right. Good-night; and, oh! take care of yourself. Don't get sick nor be unhappy! Good-night! Good-night!"

The last good-night, half tearful, half arch, was courtesied to him from the threshold, and Atalanta fled up to her chamber, and locked herself in, and ran to her balcony.

"Oh! how I did want to hug his arm and put my face into it!" she thought, all a flutter with a sweet minor happiness. "It was as though I should see father crying, and hear him say that he is ruined. I didn't escape any too soon. It would have been dreadful if I had done such a thing. What would Elise have said! Elise was behaving badly."

The house door opened, and the count came out

and whistled for a gondola. Atalanta drew back a little, and made no sign of being out. She did not think how the folded-back shutters would show that her window was still open. The count looked upward in vain for a moment; then hastily tore a leaf from his note-book, and wrote a few words on it. He looked up again. There was no head bent over the balustrade between him and the stars; and the gondola he had called was coming. He began softly humming a good-night song. There was a moment of resistance, and then she appeared. He silently held the paper up to her. She disappeared for a moment, then came back; and a cord came slipping down the air. He caught it, tied the end around his note, and saw it ascend noiselessly, and touch the balustrade just as the gondolier set one foot out on to the step, to steady the gondola for his passenger.

Atalanta, with the note clasped tight in her hand, watched him go away till the dark speck was lost to view; then went in to read her note.

It was a few words only.

"Dear angel, I do not bind you, and you have promised me nothing but your sympathy. We will wait till your parents come. But you have consoled me more than I can tell you. I adore you."

She sat looking at the note, and thinking.

"It is quite true that girls need to be watched," she whispered. "Now, if we had been alone this evening, I think that I should have treated him just as if he had been father."

She gathered her writing materials together. It was impossible to sleep until she had written everything home. There had been in her later letters an unconscious shyness in mentioning Count Alinori. But now, all must be told, even to the conviction that

if she had been alone with him that evening she should have treated him "just like father." "Even more so," she added, after a moment's consideration; and though the phrase was not verbally clear, it was perfectly understood by the two who, a fortnight later, read that hasty, impassioned letter in her far-away home.

"I am going to seal this up at once, and send it just as it is written, in spite of myself," the letter concluded. "For to-morrow morning I shall not be able to write what I feel now; and you ought to know all. Father says that excitement is as real a state as calm is, and frequently more respectable. But I am calm enough to make one resolution, and that is, that I will not talk alone with Count Alinori till you come. I dare not; for if he should ask me to run away with him, I am afraid that I should go. He wouldn't ask me to. Here is the note he sent me up on a cord to-night. I give it to you. Isn't it beautiful? Oh! he is so sweet and dear, father and mother. He is so sweet and dear!"

The blot of a tear marked eloquently this little outburst of innocent and impassioned love.

"To think of Atalanta's being in love!" cried Mary, wringing her hands. "That child!"

"But Diana was, and you were," the doctor said, hiding his own consternation. "And she is older than you were when we married. And how desperately you were in love, Molly! Think of being so in love with a man that you will gladly go and live in a log hut in the woods with him!"

"Nonsense!" cries Mary, walking to and fro, and still wringing her hands. "I am sorry that I let her go. Moonshine, and gondolas, and balconies, and strings let down for notes — this is what comes of them!"

"It isn't a bad sort of note," the doctor said, looking at the poor little scrap of paper that had gone up to their daughter's balcony in Venice.

"'Angel!'" quoted Mrs. Martin with a withering emphasis. "'Adore! I should think it was a chapter out of a French novel!"

"It's only a chapter out of real life," her husband said. "Don't you remember how I used to call you my angel, and tell you that I adored you?"

"Never!" she replied with energy. "You never used any such ridiculous expressions!"

The doctor put his hand to his forehead reflectively. "If my memory serves me rightly, I did use some very similar expressions, and you were wonderfully well pleased with them."

"James," said his wife, with a dignity which took all sentiment out of her speech, "you were a lover that any girl might have been proud of; and you have been such a husband as any woman may pray God to give her. And I want my daughter to have just such a lover, and just such a husband. Instead of that, and instead of settling down where I can sometimes see her, and have her at my bedside when I die, she has got herself entangled with a foreigner who doesn't know even how to talk with her own father and mother without an interpreter, a widower as old as I am, and who goes about playing Romeo under her balcony."

Mary stopped here, not because she had no more to say, but because she was sobbing.

"What a wonderfully effective way a woman has of putting a case!" thought the doctor, and sat with a troubled brow, looking helplessly at his wife.

"I might write Frank to take her to the Allens, in Paris," he suggested.

"He would follow her," said Mary despairingly. "Besides," wiping her eyes, "it would make her so unhappy. Since she is in love, we must try to be gentle. Violent opposition is dangerous. You remember how angry we were with your family. If they had persisted, we should have married in spite of them."

"Yes!" said the doctor, hiding a smile.

Mary took the little crushed errant note, which she knew Italian enough to read. "It seems honorable, and it is tender," she said. "I suppose 'adore' doesn't sound in Italian and French as it does in English. We mustn't scold her. It was very true and courageous of her to give us the note. I'm sure she wanted to keep it. And you see, she sent the letter she had written in spite of herself. I'm sure I couldn't have written or told everything to my father and mother."

"Oh! I don't know about that," the doctor said, looking out of the window. "I guess you told them about all."

"Nonsense, James!" with severity. "Just as if I could. You know nothing about girls."

The doctor smoothed his beard down, and smiled behind it.

"What must be, must!" sighed the wife. "Let us hope that after a longer consideration she may conclude to give him up. If not, we must resign ourselves."

"Yes, I suppose so," was the reluctant answer.

Mrs. Martin went to the window, and stood looking out, her hand resting on her husband's shoulder.

"You have always tried to correct my prejudices against races and religions; and now we must prove that we are sincere in our wish to be just to all," she

said. "I cannot say that I like Italians, though you say that the Italian of to-day is the American of 1950."

"Let us say 1900," corrected the doctor.

"We said that we wanted our children to do good in the world," she went on. "Surely a pure, truthful, and courageous woman could not fail to do good there."

Dr. Martin stood smoothing his beard down thoughtfully.

"A native New-Englander is nothing if not missionary," he said. "I'm beginning to be afraid that we've thanked God a little too much that we are 'not as other men,' and that he will show us that we are just like other men. Purity, truthfulness, and courage are as much needed in America to-day as they are in Italy, dear, and as hard to find!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE CASTELLANA.

When a man does his duty, he usually does it simply; but a woman, especially if the duty to be performed is to be a conspicuous one, is very likely to ruffle and crimp it, one might say, and tie a bow of ribbon on it.

The Signora Maria Giorgini, once convinced of her inevitable downfall, would not hear of taking possession of her husband's lawful portion and apartment: she sent their most humble personal effects round to the rooms where Paulo Giorgini had taken his wife, and went there with her husband and an old servant-woman. Her sables, her few rich articles of dress, everything of value which she had bought, was left in the palace. The large cellars were full of wine; yet she sent her old woman out ostentatiously every day for four *soldi* worth of poor white wine. The palace garden was full of fruit, and they had villas and farms where poultry ran in great flocks, and the earth gave a harvest even in winter. Yet she bought her daily egg, and twelve ounces of meat, and two *soldi* worth of salad, in the *piazza*. They had reaped wheat by tens of acres, and there were bins overflowing with the heaven-sent *vago*, and flour enough to whiten the road from Sanzio to Ombra; yet the old servant woman bought every morning a dingy loaf such as the Giorgini servants had not been wont to see put upon their table.

"If my confessor would have permitted me," she said, "I would have retired to a convent. But he would not; and I am doing what I can to expiate the Countess Emilia's sin."

She deputed Father David to announce to the new countess that the palace was at her disposal, with certified lists of silver, linen, hogsheads and bottles, blankets, etc., to show that nothing had been taken away, not even the bed that her predecessor had slept on. She wished the *frate* to go as her personal representative, though the advocate Randini had, of course, settled everything. A stockingless, shirtless *frate* was the most fitting representative of her present fortunes. She had no money to give him to pay the *vetturino*, but must beg the service of his charity.

Fra David accepted the mission, and walked ten miles of the way on a bright cool day, meditating upon many subjects as his sandalled feet measured the pleasant road, stopping now and then to offer a word and a pinch of snuff to some *contadino;* till, the stage from Sanzio overtaking him, the driver kindly gave him a lift.

Fra David was very curious to see the new countess, whom he had never met; and approached the imminent interview with a very thoughtful interest.

He found Beatrice at the Signora Mattei's; and delivered his message literally, without comments, probably with some sense of humor.

Beatrice sat and listened with an impassible face. He observed that she was not dressed in mourning. She wore her black lace with the crimson ribbons, a little toned down by a black scarf that was laid on her head, and held about her.

The *frate* looked at her critically while she looked at the hem of her gown, and listened.

"The Signora Maria Giorgini must be eighty years of age, or more, is she not?" Beatrice asked when he had got through.

"Yes, countess."

"It is rather late in life to go on to the stage as a comedy actress," she remarked dryly.

A faint change, which was scarcely a smile, passed over the monk's face; but he remained silent.

Beatrice considered a little while; and the Signora Mattei, who assisted at the interview, discreetly knitting at a window not far away, took advantage of the pause to count her stitches.

Beatrice resumed. "Since she has begun the play, I will take advantage of her move to put my uncle Giovanni's apartment in order for him. I am told that the palace needs a good deal of repairing in those rooms where ladies and gentlemen would like to live. I will drive over to-morrow. It is many years since I have been there. I went surreptitiously once. Do you remember, signora?" Her face relaxed in a pleasant, careless laugh, and she glanced over her shoulder at the lady in the window. "I shall have those rooms prepared immediately; and, as soon as they are ready, I wish the Signora Maria to return at once. I also wish her to understand that I am displeased she should have taken my uncle out of his own house in such a way, and subjected him to want and inconvenience. I have heard of the wine, and that Uncle Giovanni needs good wine."

"He certainly does, countess," the monk said. "And the Signora Maria did not make the change by my advice."

"I am glad to hear it, *padre*," Beatrice replied, with some cordiality. "And now, will you see that Don Giovanni has what he needs? I would be greatly

obliged if you would take the keys of the cellar. You can send them to me to-morrow."

Fra David received the keys with serious respect, much gratified by the trust reposed in him. It occurred to him that only a lady would be willing to consign the keys of her unexplored wine-cellar to a stranger, or, for that matter, to even most acquaintances.

Apparently the new countess was not going to be a bad *castellana*. He found that she had rather a grand air.

It was but a little after daylight when Beatrice drove away from Ombra the next morning, accompanied by Betta, her old nurse. Betta was to be housekeeper in Palazzo Giorgini.

"On the whole, Betta," she said, "I am not sorry to have the palace quite to myself for one day. I don't want to be disturbed by trifles; for to-day I am to see Alinori. He is going over with the advocate, and will come to see me at four o'clock this afternoon."

Beatrice had not seen the count since his return from Venice the week before. He had kept himself at the villa in daily consultation with the advocate Randini. While the whole public of the two towns, not to speak of the province, was on fire with the story of the Giorgini succession, he had secluded himself completely. Moreover, he tremblingly awaited the interpretation which might be put on Don Leonardo's death in connection with the matter. Carefully prepared explanations had been circulated; but he could not be sure but some whisper of the truth might transpire. If it did, he and his son were ruined. The shame and horror of it would cling to them all their lives.

Farewell, then, forever to the vision of delight which hovered over his life. No woman like Atalanta could be asked or permitted to take a name so stained.

The count reasoned from what he supposed to be the facts. What Don Leonardo had confessed, he would not ask. It was enough that the marriage record was genuine, and that Don Leonardo had declared it to be so.

"Did the Sor Chiara tell you of the German?" Betta asked.

Beatrice asked what she meant. She had heard nothing of any German.

He was a German artist, a Signor Ludwig, Betta told her, who had been going about the province all summer, painting pictures, and had been in Ombra. The Signora Maria had been on the point of letting him have a large upper chamber, or set of chambers, in Palazzo Giorgini, as a studio, when her downfall came. He had, in fact, already begun to make some improvements in the place when he was told that there was to be a new mistress in the house. He had begged the driver of the *diligenza* to get the Sor Chiara to intercede for him with the contessa. The rooms were just what he wanted. They would be his headquarters for finishing work; and he could leave his effects there when he travelled.

"He had good recommendations," Betta said, "and is a very good young man. He is very quiet. Besides, there is a private door that he could use. The chambers he wants, Madama, are over the apartment where you were born; and that has a separate stair."

"I don't think that I should like to have a studio in the house," the new countess said. "There would be models coming and going. There must be plenty

of other places in town. Tell him that I am not willing."

"Poor young man!" sighed Betta. "I am sorry for him. One can see that he has but little money. He has made some portraits for fifty francs each; and he never rides, but walks and walks."

The subject seemed to have been dropped. But when they came within sight of Sanzio, Beatrice said, "Bring your German to see me at two o'clock. I will hear what he has to say."

Sanzio in sight! Her home, her empire, her inheritance in sight! Intrigue baffled, malignity and crime exposed, the criminals punished, and the victim triumphant!

Beatrice leaned back in the carriage, and concealed her face from curious passers-by. She felt angry rather than triumphant. Life was for something better than eating one's heart out over a house, a title, a bag of money. They should have been hers without an obstacle. She might have been happy and honored all these years. Francesco Alinori would have sought her with reverence; and his family would have courted the alliance. She had lost forty years of her life. It all came too late for delight.

The chief street of the town led off straight from the *piazza*, a street of convents and palaces; and midway, the largest of them all, was Palazzo Giorgini. It was built of large blocks of *sasso-vivo*, had irregular roofs, high-pointed in one part, and flattened for a terrace in another, and a grand *portone* in the centre, with carriage entrance. Unlike Palazzo Alinori, which was on the upper side of the street, and had gardens almost level with its roof, this was on the lower side, and had gardens terraced downward from a *belvedere* built out from its ground floor, overlooking

all the grand mountain-enclosed *campagna*. At one end, the eastern, was the chapel, and a palace adjoining. At the western end a narrow lane, breaking into steps, ran down to the street below. Here was the door leading to the apartment where Beatrice's parents had lived, and over it the rooms which the German wanted for his studio. They were scarcely more than attics, but with large windows cut, and such aids to beauty as an artist has about him, might be made delightful.

The carriage, a hired one, stopped at the door, and a man who had followed them down the street with the keys opened a small door in the larger one.

"Open the whole *portone* and drive in!" Beatrice commanded.

The man made haste to swing back the heavy gate, and they drove in to the foot of a great stair.

"The advocate Randini is coming immediately," the man said, delivering a bunch of keys. "He is coming down the street."

"Stay and admit him, Betta," her mistress said. "As soon as the carriage is out, shut the *portone*. When the advocate goes away, show him out and close again."

She went up the wide, stately stair of white marble. It was hers! She turned the key in the lock, and opened the oaken door. No one could open or shut that door without her permission. There was a large ante-room with oaken benches for waiting servants, two or three old paintings, and a row of old engravings hung high up, — an ugly, respectable room. A second ante-room had a softer aspect, with sofas and tables, and a large, superb *loggia* over the belvedere.

From this led the drawing-rooms.

Waiting there, in a moment Beatrice heard steps on

the stair, and the advocate Randini entered, bearing a large and strongly clamped valise, of which he gave Beatrice the key.

"Don't leave it open on any account," he said. "And don't go out and leave it in the house. Shall I take it away this afternoon?"

"Yes. How is the count?"

"Checco is reasonable. He knows how to accept the inevitable."

"He consents to all?" she asked eagerly.

"He will accept no money for himself; but he is thankful for what you offer to do for Cesare. I would propose one hundred and fifty francs a month, and all the expenses of his education. That is amply large enough to free his father from all expense on his account, and, at the same time, not large enough to seem a veiled charity. I must say that Checco consented to this only after some consideration. You must allow him to be sensitive."

"Oh! I allow it," Beatrice said resentfully. "Though they did not allow me to be so. I am only too glad that Francesco does not follow the example of the Signora Maria. Nothing, now, would please that woman so much as to make me seem to have turned her out of the house, and starved her. I am half afraid that she may let Uncle Giovanni die there before I can get their apartment ready. I hope that you have insisted on the necessity of there seeming to be no ill will between Count Alinori and me."

"Oh! Checco understands that. He talks very well. He is going to see the Signora Maria this morning. We cannot forever refuse to explain where the record of marriage was found."

The advocate looked attentively into Beatrice's face.

"Well?" she murmured quickly.

"Of course we must confess that it was found in the chapel," he said distinctly, looking fixedly into her eyes.

"It reflects on grandmamma Tessa!" she exclaimed, reddening. "I will not have a stain left on her! She loved me!"

The advocate laid a quieting hand on her arm.

"Dear Beatrice, no stain will rest on her. The marriage record was found under the altar. Who stole it, and who put it there, is a mystery. The Countess Emilia knew that it was there somewhere, but had searched for it in vain. Who told, or intimated, this to her, is not known, and never will be known. The Signora Maria herself found the sealed package. It was directed to me, and sent to me without being opened. This, of course, frees the Countess Emilia as much as she deserves. Was she blameless in your regard, countess?"

"She loved me!" Beatrice murmured. "But who witnessed the marriage?"

"We have already mentioned two, and declined to name the third. Of course suspicion falls on the third; but we name no one."

"My grandmamma Lanciani named him," Beatrice said. "I will not have her discredited. She had nothing but poverty and suffering. She lost all. There were compensations for others, but not for her. The thought of the magnanimous and the charitable passed by above her head. She was too lowly to catch their glance."

She had spoken with an indignant passion. Suddenly she smiled. "Do you know what I am going to do? The house where I lived with her in Ombra, that poor little house with the fig-tree, was bought by the Mattei. They have promised it to me. It is

dropping down. With the same stones I am going to build there a refuge with a single large eating-room and fire-place on the ground-floor, three bed-rooms over that, and above, a little apartment for the keeper. Whatever poor stranger or *contadina* wishes to go there to cook or eat her food, shall go freely; but no one who has a home in the town shall go. And there shall be three less poor creatures to sleep on the ground."

"I am afraid that you will get cheated," remarked the advocate, to whom the scheme looked sentimental.

"I shall watch. And I will come like a sharp lash to the neck of whoever tries to cheat me. But first I will trust them. Then, there is another thing which I shall do for poor grandmamma Lanciani. There was a badly painted portrait of her, which shows her to have been a handsome woman. The Signora Mattei has it. I shall have that made a full-length. The figure shall hold its arms out to a poor little girl who runs to her. The little girl is I; and it is Poverty. That picture will hang in the lower chamber of the house. And, *à propos* of painting, do you know anything of a certain German painter who wishes to have a studio here?"

"He is a very quiet, civil young man," the advocate said. "I have seen him in Rome. He has a pretty talent; but it doesn't seem to pay him very well. He is not rich. I found him intelligent, and a person of refined feelings. He is well-bred and a little diffident. He has spoken to me of the studio, and said that it might be made all that he could want for a permanent centre, from which he could go in any direction he likes. I don't think that he would trouble you. He might be a sort of guardian for that part of the palace."

"To return," Beatrice said, after having listened attentively: "explain as you please, with the restrictions I have mentioned. It will be a bold person who asks me any questions. If suspicion must fall, let it fall where it should. But let suspicion remain a whisper. If it raises its voice, threaten. One thing I will not do: I will not put on mourning."

The advocate shrugged his shoulders.

"And now," she said with vivacity, casting that subject aside, "I want you to make a little purchase for me. Both you and Alinori can oblige me. I want a strip of land extending from the road backward between your two villas. I want enough to make a little country lodge there, with a bit of woods, a garden, an *orto*, and a little *vigna*. It will be a miniature place suitable for a pair of *sposi*. It is the part where both of your villas are least cultivated, and I will make it the most cultivated. The walls on both sides shall be at my own expense. I want the strip that will take in the laurel grove on Alinori's ground. That should be the centre."

"There is not the least difficulty in your having it," the advocate said. "I will attend to it at once."

"Don't make any changes in the land itself," she said quickly. "Leave it just as it is, only enclose it in a stone wall."

"It shall be as you wish. And now, I think we have no more to say."

Beatrice accompanied him to the door, touching the bell as she went, and waited till Betta came back from letting him out.

She had taken only a cup of coffee before leaving Ombra, and it was now nearly noon. Her breakfast was ordered to be brought at once to the gold drawing-room, and there she carried the large valise that

the advocate had left, and put it under the porphyry and gilt table on which her light collation was set.

"I sent a messenger to the German," Betta said, "and he will be here precisely at two o'clock. And here are the keys of the cellars, that Fra David gave me. He came while the advocate Randini was here. He reverences Madama, and says that he has obeyed her orders."

Beatrice studied for a moment what she could do at once in return for the *frate's* services; and an impulse, or an inspiration, came to her. It was one which must be acted on at once, or the will to follow it would not be possible to her.

Sometimes it seems as though our guardian angel gives us a little push, a veritable touch which flashes, warm and bright, through all the soul; and the swift following of the impulse is a heavenly good. But if we stop to look at it, to measure and weigh it with our trivial reason and our frozen prudence, behold! what looked to be golden is but a faded leaf, which we drop, and what looked like sunshine is a smoky lamp; and heaven's gate closes.

"Carry the waiter away," Beatrice said hastily; "and, before you do anything else, run down to the capuchin convent. Give this napoleon to Fra David, and ask him to say some masses for Don Leonardo."

It was the first time that she had mentioned his name since his death.

Betta's face flushed, and she silently bent and kissed her mistress's hand as she took the money. Nothing had been told her; but she more than guessed.

When she was alone, Beatrice closed and locked the doors, and opened wide the shutters and curtains of the windows. The room looked southward over

the garden and *campagna* with four large windows; and the sun was beginning to enter, rather putting to shame the gold of the room. The gilding of the *rococo* tables and chairs was yet bright enough; but the gold-colored damask was wofully faded, and in some places defaced. Beatrice had pulled the gray linen covers off the moment she entered. Opposite the windows, at each side of a monumental chimney-piece of beautifully carved olive wood that almost reached the ceiling, was a tall mirror painted with Loves and roses. These mirrors were nearly as tall as the chimney-piece.

Beatrice smiled with almost tasted delight as she touched the springs, unclasped the straps, and opened the complicated lock of her jewel-case. It was formed of sheet copper covered with leather, and book-shaped, with inner cases.

Whence has come that canon of modern taste which condemns splendor in dress, and calls a profusion of jewelry barbarous? Not from nature, surely. Nature cannot ornament herself enough. She is profuse in drapery and color. And what but ignorance can speak contemptuously of those crystallized color-proofs which nature makes down in the dark, where they glow like faith in the human heart, "an evidence of things unseen."

Precious stones are the sanctity of matter.

The Countess Alinori put on all her jewels, or all that she could hold, and went to see herself glitter through the painted Loves and roses.

Such diamonds! She felt a momentary chill creep, serpent-like, over her as she recollected Don Leonardo's description of them: "Dip them in water, and they will almost set it on fire!"

She put a coronet on her head, and felt as Napoleon

I. may have felt when he crowned himself with his own hand. She had no earthly person to thank.

"I admire, but I do not love you, diamonds," she said, and took the starry things off, and swung them to and fro in the sun, throwing mimic lightnings about the room.

Then there were pearls. She recollected the poor little pearls that she had fastened Atalanta's toilet veil back with, and dropped into a heap of glowing coals the day she went away. Poor little pearls! How they had shrivelled, and become tiny red coals one instant, and tiny specks of white ashes the next!

These were different indeed! Large, white, opulent, in full strings and lustrous drops.

"Yes, one might love pearls," she thought. "But they are fragile. They are like children or lambs."

They did not suit her nor her dress.

There were garnets, large, smooth stones richly colored. She found an immensity of strong, not too ethereal, human nature in them. "I will wear them always," she said, and clasped a pair of bracelets on her arms, pulling the sleeves over them. What luxurious ancestress had ordered those bracelets large enough to clasp a fine arm above the elbow? Yes, she meant to wear them day and night, they were so beautiful on the white skin.

There were emeralds, and a little collar of opals, and a heap of gold work, and some large brooches of deep-hued amethyst set in silver, and a few large topaz stones, and a cross of sapphires worthy to hang on the neck of an enshrined Madonna, and a miscellany of minor trinkets; and amid them all, *unique*, a single ruby that flashed like a diamond, and was as costly. A Giorgini had brought it from the East, where he had been sent on a mission by the Pope.

This ruby was set in a ring, and had a Sultan's initials inside.

Beatrice put the ring on her finger, turning the stone inside her hand. "That also I will wear. It is the true heart of a courageous friend."

Then she took off the watch that the *sindaco* Alinori had given her in exchange for the one she had given Aldegonda, and put on a delicate little enamelled one with a fine chain from the jewel-case. The other she would give to Cesare.

Glancing at the watch as she took it off, she saw that it lacked but fifteen minutes of two, almost time for the German artist's visit. She had spent two hours over her gems, and they had passed like a song.

There was only time to close them and hide the casket when the Signor Ludwig entered, bowing lowly, with a military stiffness, on the threshold. He was a rather solidly built young man of about thirty-five years of age, but little taller than Beatrice herself. He had very fair hair, calm blue eyes, and a blond beard that ran to a silken point.

Beatrice, leaning back in an old-gold-colored arm-chair, with a window full of sunshine flung over her like a veil, beckoned him to advance, and watched with what precision of decorum he crossed the room, hat in hand, and bowed again, standing before her. She found this first exercise of her power as *castellana* delicious.

She bent her head slightly, and left him standing. The dream of her life was true at last! She opened her hand, and looked down at the spark of rosy fire in her palm. She moved her arms, and felt the delicate clasp of their hidden bracelets.

"You want a studio here, signore," she said after a

little pause. "My lawyer has spoken to me of you, and I see no difficulty at present. Will you sit down? I have not yet seen the rooms myself, but they tell me that much will have to be done to them."

"I would do all that I want for myself, Signora Contessa," the artist said, and his voice was a pleasant one. "There is nothing necessary but three windows."

"Three windows!" she echoed, looking at him.

She caught him examining her with the freedom and appreciation of an artist. He had, in fact, had time, while she sat before him leisurely waiting, or speaking, and gazing into her hand, to note her face, form, and position.

"Three large windows in place of three little ones, Madama," he said, dropping his eyes.

She rose promptly. "We will go and see."

They went up two flights of stairs, guided by Betta, and passed a long corridor behind some attics, entering at last a very large chamber with a small one beside it. It was a very large chamber, built squarely up above the rest of the roof to give a lofty terrace. From that terrace a sparkle of sea could be seen on sunny days over the southern mountains, and twenty towns could be counted. But this Beatrice did not know.

"I did not think that there was a square chamber up here," she said. "It is large, but so rough! The beams are all uncovered."

"Will the Signora Contessa do me the favor to look out here?" the artist asked respectfully.

It was a little chink in the northern wall that, by a happy chance, was opposite a narrow street separating the walls across the way, and letting in a broad beam of light as pure as crystal.

"And here?"

She looked through a tiny western window, and saw all the west, the sky, and the blue receding mountains.

"And here?"

Again she approached a window that was but a peep-hole, and the *campagna* and all the lower town were at her feet.

"I have but to make large windows of these little ones," the German said, "and immediately the place becomes a paradise!"

"I would not object to your passing by the *portone*," the countess said; "but I would not want things carried in, nor other persons entering that way. There is a little stair somewhere which leads down to the side street. If you can use that, the place is yours to do what you will with."

A soft flash like summer lightning came into the blue eyes. The artist had lost hope. "I am grateful to Madama. The little stair I know. It is more convenient than the long corridor. The doors leading through the palace may be closed. I shall never pass that way."

"I am going to have some work done," Beatrice said, "and I will send the masons up to you. You need not pay them. It is probable that I may wish you to paint me a picture."

The artist bowed again, blushing faintly.

They went downstairs together.

"You can ask permission of the Signora Giorgini to pass by the other door," the countess said. "And when she returns to the other apartment, you will keep the key of that. I shall hold you responsible for that entrance."

She bent her head carelessly, and went to make a

tour of her palace with its sixty rooms. By walling up a door, she would be able to isolate the Signora Maria's apartment, still giving her free access to the chapel.

Her last visit was to the chapel. It remained as it had been that morning when the papers were found, one half of the floor newly paved with tiles, the other half dusty and cumbered with torn-up bricks. She found the place where the papers had been hidden, and knelt there a moment.

Then she went back to the drawing-room, and set herself to sketch a plan of the palace, and divide it into habitations. It would be impossible to live there in solitary state. Cesare must come to her when his father should be preparing to marry Atalanta. Cesare must have a tutor, and these should be their rooms. These others were for Francesco and his wife when they should visit her. She was still planning for her domestic colony when Count Alinori rang the door-bell.

At that sound, the warm, crowded social picture which had begun to take life about her faded out of sight. She had to meet a man whom her elevation had not only impoverished and disappointed, but bitterly mortified. Moreover, they each were conscious that the other had been counselled and entreated to conciliate their interests by a marriage which each had peremptorily refused. The refusal was only less stinging for having been mutual. No one likes to be refused what he has not asked.

Beatrice hastened to the ante-room door, and offered her hand with a "You are welcome, Francesco!"

"Thanks, Contessa Giorgini!" he said with great politeness, touching the tips of her fingers.

It was a chilly beginning. They seated themselves.

Beatrice had forgotten her ring, and the count, glancing at her open hand, saw the ruby. A red color shot across his forehead, and a faint, mocking smile touched his lips at the sight. He glanced about in search of the casket which she had hidden behind a sofa.

The smile and glance angered her. "Isn't it a beautiful ruby?" she asked lightly, holding her hand up. "I like it better than a diamond. It has more heart. I was in haste to see them, of course. Your Uncle Leonardo has so many times boasted of those diamonds."

His face hardened at once, and he spoke harshly.

"I think that the advocate Randini has said all that need be said, and that we understand our position. There is no need of sentiment. We both accept — with more or less difficulty — the inevitable. We are aware that it is better for both — again with an immense difference — that we should seem to be friends. I have come here to-day that all the tattling world of Sanzio may say this evening that I came. Cesare will come over to-morrow with the Sor Chiara, as you asked, and spend the day with you. It is kind of you. I own and proclaim that you are behaving well; but you must not expect me to be enthusiastic. It is easy for the prosperous to be magnanimous."

"Have I found them so?" she asked.

He was silent. He knew that she had not.

"We need not speak of the past," she added hastily. "I want to hear of your future."

He turned his face away.

"As you please!" she said. "I thought only of your good — and hers!"

"Don't touch her!" the count exclaimed passionately. "Don't touch her!"

The countess leaned back in her sofa, folded her hands lightly in her lap, and looked at him with an amused smile.

There is no word of love, however adoring, and no word of admiration, however enthusiastic, which is worth so much as a word of defence.

"He never defended me!" she thought; and she felt merciless.

The count rose, with a very ugly frown.

"Be sure of one thing, Beatrice. I swear to you that if you should ever come between that girl and me, or if you say or cause to be said one word which shall trouble her innocent heart, the one end and aim of my life thenceforth shall be to punish you!"

There was such desperation in his face that it touched her heart.

"Checco," she said, "be reasonable! I love the girl dearly. I wish for her happiness, and yours. I hope that if you want her, she will marry you; and I would gladly help. There is far more danger that she may be made unhappy by you than by me."

He drew out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead, breathing quickly and heavily.

"Tormented as I am in every way, you might spare me something," he panted. "And now, I think, the gossips have got their dose. Can I serve you in anything?"

"First and foremost," Beatrice said, rising and offering him her hand, "you can serve me by believing that I mean you no ill. Later, I shall be constantly calling on you for some advice or aid."

On the point of going, the count still paused and looked about, as though some conventional expression of interest in his surroundings were due. "You will have plenty of sun here," he remarked.

"Yes; I let it all in, you see." Her eyes filled. "I want something to rejoice with me!"

His glance swept her face, and he turned to go. "Good-by, Bice!" he said.

She followed him, and at the ante-room, where Betta waited to open the door, he bowed profoundly.

That bow was the first that he had ever made her. There was no one now to nod familiarly to her, or pass her by without even a nod. It was delightful, and — what else was it?

"I must go away!" she said, and stood frowning in the sunshine. "There is something tragical and desolate here in the very light. I must have new associations. Oh! I will go to Paris for the winter. Why have I not thought that I am free! To think that I have the power to go where I like, and forget them all!"

Betta came to say that the advocate Randini was coming down the street in a carriage of the *piazza*.

He came and took the casket.

"See!" said Beatrice, showing him her ring. "I am going to wear it every day."

He looked a little doubtful. "You must be careful, then," he said. "That ruby is worth five hundred *scudi*."

"Is that all?" she answered. "I thought it might be worth a thousand. It is pretty enough. And I have got on the two garnet bracelets," taking herself gleefully by the arms. "I shall wake up in the night to look at them."

The old man looked at her with a pleased smile, glad to see her happy. "Please yourself all you can with them," he said. "Happiness won't hurt you, Bice."

"What did the German say about coming in,

Betta?" her mistress asked when the door had closed on the advocate Randini.

"But, contessa, he has got his things all moved in," Betta said; "and he is putting them in order. He has got a lot of things hung up; and it's as pretty as a *salon*. And he's marked with chalk just what wall he wants knocked out for windows, and is gone now to order the sashes."

"And he with such calm blue eyes!" ejaculated Beatrice.

"And, signora," continued Betta, "he says that you are a picture, and that he would like to paint you in a coronet, and high ruff, with a velvet train gathered like a crouching lion at your side."

CHAPTER XL.

A CHAPTER OF LETTERS.

Mrs. Francis Elder wrote regularly on the last day of every month to her mother; and it is from extracts from these letters that this period of Atalanta's love-affairs is chiefly known.

Venice, March 31, 1870.

"The doctor and Aunt Mary arrived a week ago, and are stopping at L'Italie, and Atalanta has gone to stay with them. They are looking very well, especially Aunt Mary, who has some beautiful Paris dresses. The doctor likes to have her richly dressed.

"They come none too soon, for I was getting alarmed about Atalanta. I saw at once that the doctor was struck by her looks. She has grown thin, and seems feverish. He can't take his eyes off her. He had a long private talk with me as soon as he came. I was afraid that he might blame me, but he did not.

"The count has been here but twice this winter, for only a day or two; and they have never spoken alone together a single moment. I never saw two persons so much in love. They look actually as if they might die if separated.

"I know that the doctor and Aunt Mary have had a long conversation with Atalanta, but have concluded nothing, except that she is not to be made unhappy. She, on her part, has promised to obey them. She

seemed to feel better after this talk, and we have been going about some. The doctor pays for everything. Last night we went to the Fenice. Aunt Mary wore brown velvet, Atalanta was in white with red ribbons, and I wore cerulean. Our box was very much looked at. Atalanta has a dozen admirers.

"The Countess Giorgini, who has been passing the winter in Paris, has engaged rooms at L'Italie for the first of May. She will return by way of Switzerland and Venice. She has written several times to Atalanta, and wants us all to visit her in Sanzio.

"The count is coming again soon; and then all will be decided. We keep quiet, but are very much excited."

APRIL 30.

"The count has been here a whole week; and he has conquered! At first Aunt Mary was rather stiff; and if it hadn't been for the doctor, who would be polite to the man who was picking his pocket, there would have been some awkward moments. Then the fact that Count Alinori cannot speak a word of English, and that Aunt Mary speaks Italian very imperfectly, heightened the difficulty. Atalanta stood between the two, anxious and imploring, and interpreted them to each other, and sweetened a little the interpretations. The four went everywhere together, Alinori as *cicerone;* and he made an admirable one. Wherever they went, doors opened before them. He got them every sort of privilege. One night at the theatre they had the box of one of the first families of Venice loaned them; and there isn't a palace that they have not seen. They go to the Papadopoli gardens without a ticket.

"Well, Aunt Mary began to soften. She couldn't resist Alinori, who had made himself simply charming.

Of course he always gave his arm to her, and Atalanta went with her father; and Aunt Mary learned how irresistible good manners may be. Besides, she was highly pleased that no stolen interviews were attempted. As for stolen looks, she has to submit to them, though she always sighs when she intercepts one.

"Yesterday came the culminating scene, which was worthy of a theatre. They met here, and it was a regular family council. The doctor and Count Alinori had been out together in the morning, and then they all had breakfast with me. The count was rather abstracted, and scarcely took his eyes from Atalanta. She looked nervous, and hardly ate a mouthful. I might have spared my mayonnaise, and the brown Egyptian obelisk with white hieroglyphs, made of chocolate ice, — the two gems of the collation, — for any heartfelt appreciation they received. Everybody felt that something was going to happen.

"It happened after we had had our cup of Turkish coffee, another rarity which wasted its sweetness on the desert air. To state the fact baldly, the doctor announced that they were sensible of the honor that Count Alinori had done them, and that their sole motive in imposing a probation was their daughter's youth and the fact that when she married the ocean would roll between her and her parents and the home of her childhood. They had therefore decided that if both the count and their daughter should be of the same mind a year from that day, they would consent to the marriage without interposing any further delay.

"It was affecting to hear the doctor speak. Both he and Aunt Mary were choking; and his voice got hoarse and unsteady more than once.

"Atalanta got up and threw her arms round his neck, and held him tight, till finally he smiled, and

took her arms away; and then she kissed her mother, and stood a moment cheek to cheek with her, in such a pretty way!

"While she stood there, the count made a very nice reply, in which he thanked them for their consent, and did not complain of the delay, though he confessed that it was a severe trial.

"Atalanta stood stroking her mother's hair, and smiling at it as she listened, and at his last word she turned and went rather bashfully to him.

"'Father and mother have been so kind,' she said. 'We have known each other twenty-three years, and you and I have been acquainted only a year, — not quite a year, either. I would gladly stay with them a little longer, and my heart will bleed in losing sight of them. Think how good they are to stay here a whole year, when they meant to have gone home in the autumn!'

"The doctor exclaimed, 'Why! Atalanta, you are going home with us to wait!'

"I never saw such a change in a face. She did not make a movement, except that her eyes fell. She even seemed to be still smiling a little. But the whiteness of her! She actually sparkled with whiteness, like frost. And then her head dropped sideways, and the count and Uncle James caught her; and she had fainted.

"You can imagine the scene that followed. Aunt Mary was in despair. And the count for the first time claimed his rights, and knelt before the sofa where she lay; and his was the first face that she saw when she opened her eyes. She sighed out an 'Oh!' and held up her arms; and he kissed her. It must have been for the first time.

"She rose up then all blushing, and called her

father, and made him sit down by her. She seemed to have recovered her spirits, or to have gained self-control. She said that she did not know what had made her faint. She was sorry to have given us all so much trouble; she was quite well, and, moreover, she was content to do just as her parents wished. She had made a silly mistake. Everybody was so kind to her, and made so much more of her than she deserved, that she had almost got to take for granted that all business and affairs must stop on her account, and time itself move to please her. 'Everything has been so beautiful, I forgot that I was not in heaven, where nothing is denied,' she said. 'And now I am going to be reasonable, father, and happy. You mustn't think that I do not want to go home.'

"It was nicely said, and it soothed them for the time; but she has been different since. She has her feverish red cheeks again. And she will no longer let the count give his attentions all to Aunt Mary. Since she is to be separated from him, she will not lose a glance.

"The doctor watches her with a very serious, thoughtful look; but Alinori seems triumphant. He has put all his reserve aside, and is one of the most devoted of lovers. Walking ahead with Aunt Mary on his arm, he looks back every moment; in the gondola he sits in the corner next Atalanta; and he helps her in and out. He always sits by her when they are here; and they often talk apart, and go out into the balcony together. If he were rich enough, I am sure that he would follow her to America. But he is not."

VENICE, May 30.

"The Countess Giorgini has just gone away, and the count left a fortnight ago. In July we are all

going to stay a week in Palazzo Alinori, and then for a fortnight to Sanzio as the guests of the Countess Beatrice. She has included me and Frank with the greatest politeness; but I think we ought not to accept the full time offered. I am not quite sure. She seems to do things on a rather large scale, and can afford to; but I fancy she would like a week of my time as well as a fortnight. We were no great friends when I was at Ombra.

"She is exceedingly fond of Atalanta, who thinks her an angel. She is certainly a very handsome woman, and she dresses beautifully. But, oddly enough, she has worn no mourning for her husband. I never believed that she cared anything about him.

"Alinori says that the people of Sanzio were very much disappointed at her going away, and that it is the first time that the place was ever closed. In fact, there were two old persons in it, and some artist or other, who lived there as guardian; but of course they do not count.

"The countess was presented here by Alinori, and received a good deal of attention, though people wondered that he could take his loss so well."

OMBRA, July 31.

"I am here all alone again in Palazzo Alinori, and find it rather dull, after an exciting month. The doctor and his family are gone; but — thereby hangs a tale.

"Let me tell it in order.

"The doctor, Aunt Mary, and Atalanta spent all of June in the south of Italy, and made their promised visit here the first week of this month. They were entertained with dignity and elegance, if not with splendor. I think that his inability to do more was a

constant thorn in Alinori's heart. He is one of the men who like to have hundreds of wax candles lighted in the evening when there are visitors, and a servant waiting in the ante-room from morning to night.

"Atalanta's birthday, which comes on the 4th of July, gave occasion for a double celebration. When we looked out in the morning, there was an American flag over the *portone;* and the house was decorated with flowers. During the day the whole notability of the town called, and some sent complimentary poems stamped on tinted paper. There was a fine dinner, and the house was illuminated at night with colored lanterns.

"Aunt Mary was divided between pleasure and despair. She saw that all this was compromising. The *festa* was for the future Countess Alinori. She told me that during their southern journey Atalanta was listless and drooping, though she tried to be cheerful. When she thought that no one observed her, she would press her hand over her heart, and sigh as if in pain. It was only when they started to return that she showed any real life.

"'What will she do when she sets out for America, if she cannot leave him now for four weeks!' she exclaimed. She says that the doctor is afraid Atalanta may fall into a consumption, going in this state, with depressed feelings and vitality, from a mild climate to a cold one. They dread the winter following on such a parting for her.

"We are all astonished to find her such a Juliet, when she always seemed so reasonable and gentle.

"When we left Ombra to go to Sanzio the first scene occurred, though Alinori was going with us. Atalanta took leave of the palace. She had previously taken leave of the villa, but without seeming

much the worse for it. Now she quite lost her self-control, and sobbed as if her heart would break as she went about to take her last look at the terrace where she had sat the first evening she ever spent in Ombra, the garden where she had walked so many times, and the *salon* where Alinori used to read to her. He was with her, and she reminded him, —

"'It was here you sat when you read the Purgatory,' she said; 'and I recollect how you repeated the words, "Thou seest that I am one who weep."'

"And in the garden: 'You found me a six-petalled jasmine, because it was perhaps happier than those of five petals. Oh! give me one now that has but four.'

"And on the terrace: 'I saw a shooting star that first night here, the moment I came out.'

"As we drove to Sanzio, she seemed to be taking leave of every stone and tree at the road-side, and scarcely spoke a word.

"The fortnight in Sanzio, how shall I describe it!

"Everybody there had paid their respects to the new countess; and our visit was a continual *festa*.

"'See what I thought to offer her!' the count said to Uncle James, as we came out after dinner the first evening into the line of *salons*, all lighted for a reception, nothing but wax candles anywhere.

"The doctor looked at him very kindly, and said: 'I am sorry for your loss, dear sir! But, as far as my daughter is concerned, it makes no difference whatever. You can be as happy there as here.'

"This is one of the speeches which nobody here can understand. Indifference to money is to them incredible. In fact, we are not indifferent any more than they. Probably, we do not mind so much its going, because we always hope to earn some more. They do not earn; they only inherit.

"I think that both the doctor and Aunt Mary were more friendly with the count here than they were at Ombra. They knew how he must feel, and he kept reminding them. He couldn't help it.

"When the countess wore some of her diamonds one night, he said to Atalanta, 'I hoped to give them to you!'

"I heard her answer, though she whispered it: 'When I have you beside me, I have no need of diamonds!'

"It is Romeo and Juliet all over.

"Finally came the day of separation. I must say that Atalanta did not affect anything. She tried as well as she could to control herself. It was pitiful to see her going about and trying to act as if nothing were the matter. The two were left very much to themselves all day; and when there was only half an hour more, Atalanta went and sat beside the count on a sofa, and put her hand in his. She looked as if she were dying. She sat mute, and none of us could say a word. The count kept her hand, and, from time to time, said a word in a low tone.

"At length the countess went to them, and, putting her arms around Atalanta, tried to encourage her.

"She made no answer, but put her faintly aside; for she had come between her and Alinori.

"The doctor could bear it no longer. Atalanta's eyes seemed to be growing dim; and still they were fixed on the count, who knelt down before her, and put his arm around her; and her father took her hand.

"'My God!' he muttered; and then louder, as if she were losing her senses, 'My child, if it hurts you so, you shall not go!'

"She moved her lips, but could not speak.

"'She shall not go!' the count exclaimed.

"She spoke then, such a poor, faint voice, 'Oh, yes!' she said, 'I will go. I ought to go. But, my love, I am looking my last on you. We shall never meet again!'

"We were all crying, and we were all terrified. We felt that she was speaking the truth, and that if she went, they would never meet again.

"Well, we didn't leave Sanzio that day. We had enough to do trying to get a little life into that poor child. And the next morning, when we parted, the count and I for Ombra, the doctor and his family for Switzerland and Germany, it was about decided that when they go back to America in the autumn, they will leave Atalanta Countess Alinori.

"Oddly enough, she is the only one who does not say that it will be so. She says, 'I shall go if I can.'

"The doctor and Aunt Mary say: 'After all, it would break her heart to leave him going, and break it again to leave us all in coming back. Why should she be made to suffer so?'"

OMBRA, August 31.

"Never did I pass so dull a summer. There are some people here, but they do not interest me. Frank has gone back to Venice. The count is almost invisible. He is rapturously and rapidly preparing to be married. He regards the matter as settled; and they do not say no."

SEPTEMBER 30.

"All is settled. They are to be married the last of October in Venice, and then the doctor and Aunt Mary will set out for America at once. The marriage will be a civil and Protestant one, and private. Little Cesare will go to live with the Countess Giorgini, and have a tutor, a clergyman, who is to be also resident

chaplain. There is a lame old *canonico* who will take the post."

VENICE, November 2.

"Of course I haven't been able to write for a day or two. The Count and Countess Alinori have gone to Naples, and aunt and uncle are in England by this time.

"I think that the doctor gave Atalanta ten thousand dollars, but am not sure. The Countess Giorgini sent the bride a pearl necklace, and has fitted up newly the bridal chambers, a bedroom and two dressing-rooms, in Palazzo Alinori.

"I cannot describe the parting between Atalanta and her parents. I never saw anything so beautiful and pathetic. As usual, it was the doctor who ended by cheering everybody up, though he broke down at first.

"The last we saw of the bride and groom was a picture to remember. Atalanta had begged us not to go to the station, and we stood in the balcony, watching their gondola up the canal. They had ordered an open one so as not to lose one glimpse. There they sat, the gondolier steering so as not to come between us and them, Atalanta leaning back against her husband, and both faces turned our way.

"I took an opera-glass, but the others couldn't. We can just see the Rialto bridge from our house, a dark arch, and nothing beyond. From under that arch a white handkerchief fluttered, and they disappeared.

"I declare it made me think of Pluto and Proserpine!"

CHAPTER XLI.

AN INDIAN VASE.

The Countess Giorgini spent the first winter of her prosperity in Paris, made a flying visit to London, and got a glimpse of Germany and Switzerland on her way home. She passed through Nuremberg, going out of her way to do so, because it was the native city of Signor Ludwig. "He will be pleased to speak to one who has seen it," she thought.

When she reached Sanzio, people came and bowed down to her. On her first coming, some charming creatures, while visiting her, as a matter of course, had privately whispered that they had found a new countess in the Alinori kitchen. Beatrice, who knew most things that occurred, knew that, and proposed to herself to smilingly trample these women like ripe grapes when occasion should offer.

The Signora Maria, who was nearly imbecile, called her "Paulo's wife," and showed her a weak hostility, but did not dare to say her soul was her own. Don Giovanni, who improved with age, was fond of her, and called her "Child!" but was equally confused as to her identity.

The summer of her return was chiefly occupied with the matrimonial affairs of Count Alinori. As soon as it was decided that Atalanta should not be forced to return to America, the countess asked permission to fit up the bride's chamber in her own way, and at her own expense, and pleased herself immensely in turn-

ing the ugliest and roughest corner of Palazzo Alinori into a bower of beauty.

Cesare came to Sanzio and took possession of his chamber there, and had a pony, and lived like a little prince. The tutor, a lame old *canonico*, living rather uncomfortably with some of his relatives, knelt down before his crucifix, the first time he was alone in the pleasant chamber assigned him, and thanked God for having given him a peaceful shelter for his old age, and an opportunity to finish the work on which his soul was set — a history of Ombra, his native town.

The Signor Ludwig was still in the house, and likely to remain. He was but little seen in the family, but had been useful in all Beatrice's works. He planned and furnished the bridal bower of the young Countess Alinori; and when he went home to Germany for a visit, he was intrusted with the task of buying new furniture in Paris for some of the Giorgini *salons*. He also realized his wish to paint the Countess Giorgini's portrait in her coronet, a high ruff, and a velvet train gathered like a lion crouched at her side.

Then, Madama looked about to see what she should do next. The Count and Countess Alinori were back from their bridal tour, and had driven over the very day after their return, to thank her for the beautiful work done for them. A telegram had already given the first prompt acknowledgment.

Their visit had left her very serious. The sight of that young bride, who seemed to dissolve in her husband's glance, whose face turned ever his way, who, with the most perfect good taste, yet showed that she tuned her very breath to his, affected her strangely. Atalanta seemed to be lost in her husband, and, almost smileless, was blissfully happy.

Beatrice had wondered if his adoration would out-

last the honeymoon; and she saw no sign, as yet, of its waning. She did not believe in that impassioned close chord of being where two hearts vibrate to the same touch. "'One loves, and the other submits to be loved,'" she said. Yet these two adored each other.

"It is pretty," she sighed, when they were gone; "but it is the color on the cloud. Love shines on them in passing."

After their visit, she felt more than ever the need of an occupation. Her domestic machinery had been arranged, and well trained servants kept it going smoothly; her charities were in order; and her social duties were condensed into a small space.

Into this vacuum a ghost was rising, as it had risen into every unemployed space of time for months. She had put it down with the prayer: "Wait a little longer!" And again: "Wait!" When this thing or that should be done, she would perform the solemn duty at which her soul shuddered.

And now, there was nothing else to do.

Yet again she said, "Wait!" She would have a grand requiem mass sung for her father.

Low masses had already been said for her parents, and the daily mass in the palace had always a memento for them; but now she prepared a pageant.

The cathedral was draped in black, all daylight was shut out, and a mournful light of wax candles and torches shone on the faces of a multitude. The church music of Sanzio was exceptionally good, and great preparations had been made for this requiem. The whole town went to hear it, and to see the sight. All the old story of Paulo's death came up again, and every tongue had its version.

Beatrice, wrapped and veiled in black, entered the church through the sacristy, and was hidden in a little

loggia overlooking all. She could see the faces that blotched thickly the dim nave and aisles, the huge sarcophagus in the centre, the priests in their black vestments, the great torches of yellow wax set in three-footed iron candlesticks, and, arching over all, a roof where the hovering angels were scarcely visible. And through all this heavy gloom rose the solemn chant, like a cry from the tomb.

As she listened to that wailing sound, and saw the slow movements of the clergy, and the censer-smoke curl whitely and lose itself in the dim air, the sunshine and the cheerful sounds of human life became as a myth, far away and unattainable. The terrors of her past history rose before her, all that she knew, and all that she had refused to think of, and horror seized upon her.

When, the service ended, the sacristan came to light her down the stair, he found her lying almost senseless in the *loggia*.

The very next day she sent for the advocate Randini, and bade him settle at once the measurements of the land he was to set off and buy for her between his villa and Alinori's. There was to be nothing touched, not a stick nor a stone, on the land itself; but a stone wall was to be built at either side.

Then she ordered the Signor Ludwig to make a copy of her portrait as an Epiphany present to the Countess Alinori.

From a sentiment of delicacy, she had meant to give a different portrait, one which should not so aggressively present her rank, as well as herself; but as that torment of the hour took her, she changed her idea.

"They shall have me in train, coronet, and jewels!" she thought. "Let the house that has seen me almost

a servant see me crowned. Let those who scorned my mother and murdered my father see in me their vindication. I will send it like a gauntlet!"

"When the copy is done, send it to the Contessa 'Lata," she said to the artist. "She is going to give you sittings also. She has promised. The portrait will be sent to her parents in America. Take the sketches, but keep the rest a secret; for I want it to be a surprise to her. It must be painted on a gold ground, like that angel there. Make it simple and holy. I trust you to do it. I am going away."

She was talking with the artist in his studio, Betta at one of the windows.

"Madama goes away again?" the artist said.

"Yes; I cannot stay. I feel feverish. You will be here all winter?"

"With your kind permission, countess."

"Then I should be greatly obliged if you would write me occasionally, once a month would do, how things are getting on. Betta's letters are not always easy to make out; and the *canonico* would be sure to write me of his history, poor, dear soul! I shall want to know how the Countess Alinori's picture succeeds. Tell me if Cesare is happy. Cesare is fond of you."

"How long will the countess be away?" the artist asked.

"How long does it take a decision to mature?" she retorted. "I do not know. When my mind shall have worked itself clear, I shall come back. Leaving metaphysics out of the question, I may be gone anywhere from two to four months. Oh! do not fancy that I am unwilling to tell you," — he had colored at her reply. "It is simply that I do not know. It is quite correct that you should ask. I am going to Egypt. It is not impossible that I may go to Pales-

tine. Of course I shall write my intentions as soon as they are formed."

She set out at once, accompanied, as before, by a maid and courier, and travelled with a tourist's devouring haste. If ever she stopped to dream, the trouble came back, and she heard that haunting whisper in her ears: "The well under the laurels!"

In February she was back again in Sanzio, laden with spoils of the East, and bright with courage. The palace grew alive again, and the sight of madama's carriage in the streets took off the public hat like a high wind. There were visits and breakfasts and dinners, and everybody wanted to see what the countess had brought home with her.

One article alone she did not exhibit. In the bustle and confusion of arriving boxes and cases, when a small and select committee of tramps had presented themselves with the hope of receiving a *lira* for a *soldo* worth of labor, no one but those who had been told to look out for it observed or remembered a large, but not very heavy, box which was taken up to the chamber which the mistress of the house had chosen as her private sanctum, and where no one else was permitted to enter but Betta. On this occasion the Signor Ludwig entered, and it was he who opened the box. It contained nothing but a very large Indian vase, or jar, of a dark blue. It had a wide mouth, closely covered, and contained packages of incense, chips of sandal-wood, spices, and cakes of camphor. It seemed an innocent enough piece of porcelain; yet if one had watched Beatrice as she searched for it and bought it, measuring its length and breadth with her eyes, and calculating the size of the mouth, it would have been seen that the feeling it awakened in her mind was one of horror. She had given her courier no order for

such a vase, nor asked for such a one; but wherever she went among shops and bazaars, if vases were sold, her glance flashed searchingly along them. She bought this one in seeming carelessness; yet she always knew where it was among her baggage; and it was the first case her eyes sought when she received her boxes in Sanzio.

A day or two after her return, she sent for the advocate Randini, who left her much agitated, and went over to Ombra to see Count Alinori. He met the count at the post-office, and they walked a little way out of town, talking. Their walk was a short one, for the countess was expecting her husband to drive out with her; and Alinori returned from it in a thoughtful and abstracted mood.

"I wish you would let Giacomo come out with you in the morning," were the advocate's last words to his friend. "I have something for him to do, and he is to be trusted. He has been so long in the family that his interests are identified with yours. And, Alinori, come as privately as you can, and say not a word to your wife."

The next morning the count went out earlier than usual, immediately after Giacomo went to the *piazza* for the morning marketing; and in a few minutes a *contadino* came back with the market-basket, and a message for the countess. Her husband had to go out to the villa to see to the wine, and had taken Giacomo with him. She was not to keep breakfast waiting for him, as he might not be at home. She need not come out for him, even if he should not return before the hour for her drive. He had to see the advocate Randini, who was at his villa, and who would, perhaps, dine with them that evening.

About the same time in the morning the straggling

contadini saw a light carryall with one horse bowling swiftly over the road from Sanzio to Ombra. Some of them recognized it as one of the Giorgini carriages; but no one saw the lady who sat withdrawn into one corner, with a veil over her face, nor the large box which crowded her feet. The carryall did not pass through Ombra, but by a longer road to villa Randini. The countess wanted to look at some land which she thought of buying on the lower road.

She had left Sanzio at six o'clock in the morning, to the great wonderment of all who were awake in the neighborhood; and Betta informed the household that the box contained a bag of pure Mocha coffee and a chest of tea which the countess had brought from the East, and was going to make a present to somebody, probably the Contessa 'Lata.

The gate leading to villa Randini was open; and when they drove up to the door, the advocate stood on the step.

Beatrice saluted him gayly. "And, see! I have not forgotten your coffee," she said.

The advocate apologized for having to ask her driver to set the box down. His man had gone out into the field for something.

In fact, no soul was visible but the master of the house, who had come out from Ombra that morning, having slept in a hotel.

"Now, Pietro," the countess said to her coachman, "go straight home again; and at five o'clock this evening, meet me with the barouche at the white *vigna*. I have got so much to do to-day! I will hire a carriage to go there."

"I have looked at the land we spoke of," she said to the advocate, then stopped suddenly. The sound of wheels told her that Pietro was driving away.

"Is Alinori here?" she asked quickly.

"He is in the other villa; but will come when I whistle for him."

"Well?"

"I told him this morning here. You were right in forbidding me to tell him before. He was overcome. His terror lest his wife should know is something extraordinary. He has gone to see that no one is about over there. I managed to get the farmer off on business that will keep him all day; and his wife has teeth-ache."

"Is Giacomo here?"

"He is in the house." He raised his voice and called, and Giacomo came out. His teeth were chattering as he came, and his eyes wild.

"Now, Giacomo," the countess said sharply, "you are not to be afraid of anything. You will sleep to-night in your own little attic in my house in Sanzio. It is not necessary; but I take you to content your mind. You will yourself drive me from here to within five miles of Sanzio in the advocate's carriage. My carriage meets me there, and you follow in the advocate's to Sanzio. To-morrow his carriage will be sent back, and you will remain with me. There is no one who will wish to harm you; but all has been provided for as if there were. And now, to work!"

With the moment of action she found her courage. They crossed the field to the laurels. All the ground underneath them was thick with fallen leaves, brown ones of the year before over-strewn with the glossy gold that had but just fallen. A few pink-tipped daisies had managed to push their small heads through; and others became visible when Giacomo swept the rustling drift away, and left the turf clear.

Beatrice examined the ground, and saw that it had not been disturbed. Then she ordered Giacomo to take his spade. "You are sure that you know the precise spot?" she asked.

Looking up, she saw Count Alinori standing opposite her with a pale and gloomy face. It startled her, for she had forgotten him. They exchanged a glance, but no salutation; and the work went on in silence.

Only a thin soil lay over the roots that covered the well; and in a few minutes they were bare, showing by their dark interstices that the boards which had at first been laid across were long since decayed and fallen.

Giacomo drew a knife from his belt, and began cutting the roots, seeming to make a display of the weapon. It had a straight double-edged blade a palm long, and a straight handle, cross-shaped.

The three exchanged a glance. It was against the law to carry such a knife; but they could hardly tell him so; and the faint wintry smile with which he glanced around as he restored it to its sheath betrayed a complacent perception of his power.

Beatrice retired from the open well.

"I cannot, my friend! I cannot!" she said, looking at the advocate.

Alinori came resolutely forward, and did not observe that Giacomo retreated at his approach. The advocate lighted a coil of wax taper, and signed the man to let the ladder down.

The ladder was lowered into the well, that was not deep enough to take it all in; and Count Alinori stood by to hold it steady.

"Go down quickly!" whispered Beatrice, surprised at the man's backwardness.

Giacomo's terror burst forth, "I will not go while he is there! He will push me in!"

The count stared at him; then, with a bitter laugh, walked away to a little distance.

"You are an imbecile, Giacomo!" the countess said. "Go down at once. One is really tempted to do you a harm."

"You are not afraid of me, Giacomo," the advocate said. "Go down, and I will stand here. Give me the basket and rope."

Giacomo glanced at Count Alinori, and went down. The basket was lowered, and they waited in silence till the word should be given to draw it up again.

It came up once with the roots and twigs that had just fallen.

Beatrice felt herself turn sick all at once. She went away, and began walking to and fro where she could see what they were doing. Every time the basket came up, she stopped, and held her breath. When its contents were thrown away, she resumed her walk. It was more than forty years since that well had been closed. A good deal of earth must have fallen in that time.

It was noon, and the February sun hung over the southern tree-tops, that were beginning to bud. Northward, in the great warm hollow against the mountain wall, almond trees, all white with bloom, dotted the gray and green. How cool and quiet it all was, winter just sinking into the lap of spring; but in that little grove, what fever!

Beatrice paused to look. They were throwing away a basket-full of *débris* with a carelessness that showed it to be of no value; and she was about resuming her walk, when she saw a spark of light amid the earth as it rolled out.

It did not change as she went nearer, but asserted

the more its point of fire. She bent and caught up a ring set with a small diamond.

It was true then!

She held it up, and the two nodded, but said nothing. She went out of the grove again, wiping the ring, and thinking, "My father's life once kept it warm! Yet I never kissed the hand that wore it, nor felt it laid upon my head, nor put my own hand in it to be led. Oh, my dead father's hand! May it not yet have led me, and kept many a peril from my head, and at last drawn back the veil from this iniquity?"

She kissed the ring, and hid it in her bosom.

Two or three minutes passed before she looked again at the grove; and then she saw that Giacomo was just stepping out of the well, and that the other two were looking at her. Giacomo carried the basket on his shoulder. He set it down, and Count Alinori caught off the circular cloak he wore, and covered it over. With a faint cry Beatrice hastened to them.

"Bice, dear," said the old advocate, "you had better go into the house."

She obeyed him, and went into the house, crying as she went. All her filial instincts went feeling their way back in the dark in search of that affection which had never existed, and which her life had ached for. And almost more than the affection she groped, moaning, for the wild grief of an orphan who loses a father whom she has known.

The first person to come to her was Alinori. She saw him coming, and went out to meet him.

It needed but a glance to tell her that he was the greater sufferer that day.

"Beatrice," he said, "for God's sake, don't let my wife know!"

She pitied him; but she could not, at least on that day, extend her hand to an Alinori.

"Your wife will never know from me, nor by my will, Francesco," she said. "Do not fear! Every precaution has been used to secure secrecy."

"That Giacomo!" he said. "It was he told you!"

She met his eyes steadily. "It was his father told me twenty-eight years ago. He was killed that very day. He was seen speaking to me. Lo Zoppo was guilty; but he suffered remorse, and paid with his life. Giacomo is safe. He knows his father's crime, and therefore can tell nothing."

"You have known it all these years!" the count exclaimed incredulously.

"I knew when I was but fourteen years old that this was a 'fatal spot.'"

"What else have you concealed?" he asked. "Let it all come out now!"

"There is nothing else. All is done now. Only you must not fear Giacomo. He is safe; and, Francesco, he is under my protection."

"Great heaven!" the count exclaimed. "Do you think that I will murder him? If you fear me so much, I shall begin to ask myself what you have taken my son into your house for, and if he is safe there!"

Beatrice smiled faintly. "One thought would be almost as absurd as the other; except that you might naturally feel uneasy about the man. Trust him to me. And don't think that I reflect on you anything of all this. That man was my father's cousin, as well as your uncle. His mother and my grandfather were brother and sister. If the relationship stains, it stains both of us. Let him rest — if he can. For your wife,

Francesco, why do you not tell her all? Why do you have any concealments from her?"

"Tell her!" he cried. "Impossible! In the name of God, Beatrice, how can you suggest such a thing!"

"I think that you might trust to her generosity. All this is not your fault. She will pity you."

"It is impossible!" he repeated. "It would be my ruin and hers. The question is not how she will feel toward me, but of the effect on herself. I know her. If she did not die of horror, she would fly from us all as from a people accursed. She would look with terror on you who have concealed this knowledge so long, and who married that man while you suspected him. We are not like Atalanta, Bice. In the sight of God we may not be so bad as she would think us; but we have become accustomed to many things which to her are satanic. Have mercy on her, if not on me!"

"I suppose you know her best," Beatrice said with a sigh. "I only believed that a woman who truly loves is generous. Be content. I will never let her know, if I can help it."

Giacomo came to the house, opened the box that the countess had brought, and took out the Indian vase.

"Will it do?" Beatrice asked of the count. "Oh! Oh!"

He nodded, and Giacomo went out to the laurels, bearing the vase with him.

"But what are they going to do?" the count asked.

"They will bury it there now temporarily. I want you to help about the matter later on. I am going to build a little chapel in the laurels, with a crucifix behind a screen. The well will be filled, and the foundations laid over it. When all is ready, a little chamber is to be made of cemented stone under the crucifix,

and the vase put into it. And by and by, Francesco, your children will play about the place, and make it innocent. And now good-by. I am going out to walk in the open air. Presently I will come back. It is impossible to keep still."

There was a wall at the northern side of the villa, and beyond the wall a road that came round to Ombra from some *rocca*, or mountain hamlet, out of sight. There was a sound of singing in this road, a score or so of voices of men and women, sounding like children; and above the wall a little madonna in a flower-decked shrine set on a flower-wreathed pole moved along, borne by the invisible choir. It was some mountain madonna; and on this, her *festa*, they bore her to the town, and home again, singing her hymns. They gathered in a motley company about the shrine-bearer, the men with their heads uncovered in the beauty of reverence.

The songs they sing are often ungrammatical, sometimes without rhythm or rhyme; yet strong, and dramatic, and sweet, like Giotto's pictures.

Beatrice heard the words they sang almost without a tune. They seemed to be telling a story all together:

"The Madonna, walking farther on, met her son, and cried to him: O son, have you seen your brother?

Yes, mother; I have seen him between two thieves. I knew him.

The Madonna, walking farther on, found the Masters making a holy cross.

Blessings be upon you, my dear Masters! For whom are you making that holy cross?

We are making it for Jesus, called the Christ, Son of the Virgin Mary.

Do not make it either large or heavy for those innocent shoulders to bear!

Yet larger and more heavy will we make it; so that the more money it may gain us.

The Madonna, walking farther on, found the Masters who made the holy crown.

Blessings be upon you, my dear Masters! For whom do you make that holy crown?

We make it for Jesus, called the Christ, Son of the Virgin Mary.

Do not make it either sharp or heavy for that innocent head to wear!

Yet sharper and more heavy will we make it; so that the more money it may gain us.

The Madonna, walking farther on, found the Masters making the holy nails.

May blessings be upon you, my dear Masters! For whom do you make those holy nails?

We make them for Jesus, called the Christ, Son of the Virgin Mary.

Do not make them either large or piercing to be borne by those innocent hands!

Yet larger and more piercing will we make them; so that the more money they may gain us.

The Madonna, walking farther on, found the stair to Mount Calvary, and, taking up a stone, she began to knock at the holy door.

The porter heard her knocking, and came to the window.

Woman, here you cannot enter; for there is one to be crucified."

The voices faded in a bird-like clamor down the road, and the little flower-wreathed shrine disappeared.

A thunder-storm was passing across the southern sky, gray rain below a black platform of cloud, and above, a whole Olympus of snow-white gods and goddesses, Loves, birds and demons sailing supported on the tempest. The figures slowly melted into each other, and took new shapes, an angel came out, a lion crouched at his feet, a gigantic profile of heavenly beauty showed for a moment, and then assumed some other shape, but always sculpturesque.

Beatrice stood a moment watching that splendid mountain-range of aerial Carrara. "How do we know what shapes may be close above us, while we shrink and tremble in the lower tempest!" she thought.

She took courage to go back to the laurels, thinking as she heard a distant roll of thunder: "Now the serpents will wake up!"

In Italy the first thunder wakens the serpents.

Giacomo had dug a large hole half under one of the laurel trees, and lined it with the glossy leaves. As Beatrice appeared, he set the vase into its place. She went forward and herself covered it with leaves that had turned golden. Then she knelt down till the earth was thrown in, and covered with sod, and the dry leaves swept back to cover all.

It was peacefully over, and they went away.

Count Alinori walked back to town alone, the advocate promising to go later and dine with him.

Atalanta received her husband with an embrace of loving welcome, and began to make him comfortable. His hands were cold. She had expected it, and got a bit of fire on purpose. "Don't be afraid of it. It isn't one of my great roaring fires of America, it is a kitten of a fire. Here's your great arm-chair wheeled up by the winged countess. And here's my own gilt

tumbler full of old Chianti, and two inches of bread, and the breast of a pigeon. You mustn't have enough to spoil your dinner. We are going to have a wondrous dinner; and the advocate Randini must sleep here. I am sorry that he went to the hotel last night. Nina says that they have narrow beds there, with such springs in them that when you turn over you are in danger of bouncing out on to the floor. It's like being tossed in a blanket."

The count disposed of his dainty *merenda*, then held out his arms. It was, apparently, a familiar gesture; for Atalanta went to seat herself on his knees, and began curling his *moustachios* for him, while giving a further account of herself.

"The Signor Ludwig has been over this afternoon for the last sitting for my portrait, so I did not drive. He says it will be ready to send next month, and that we must drive over and see it. He thinks it a success, but will tell me nothing of the position or dress. They want to exhibit it here three days, and in Florence a week, before sending it away. I am willing, for it may help the artist. Bice says that he is cleverer than people are aware. I find him very gentlemanly and agreeable. What are you biting my finger for? Did I twist the wrong way? Well, that's what I've been amusing myself with. Now I must tell you of a terrible duty I have performed."

"A terrible duty!" her husband echoed.

His day's experience was being charmed away from his memory; but this brought it back again.

"Yes." She left his moustaches, and became serious. "I never liked to tell you, Francesco, but I have for a long time been afraid that Nina doesn't always tell the truth, and that she is too curious. I couldn't help thinking that she would even listen at doors.

She has done so certainly. Well, to-day I spoke to her about it. It was so hard! I felt myself blushing. I told her that I spoke as a friend, and didn't want to hurt her feelings."

"Well?" said the count, half amused, and wholly touched. The idea of an accomplished little spy, in whose mouth words lost their meaning, absolutely being approached with all this delicacy and tenderness, was odd. He had himself once led her by the ear from a door where he had found her, and shaken her besides.

"Well, she seemed astonished," Atalanta said. "She was speechless. I told her how we should try to tell the truth always, even when it is hard to tell; and then we will not be afraid to look any one in the face."

The count remembered that Nina was fully able to tell the most abominable lies while looking serenely into any face whatever.

"As for listening at doors, I asked her how she would like it if some one were to listen at her door if she were telling a friend some secret she didn't want should be known."

"What did she say?" asked Alinori, wondering much how a girl accustomed to being roughly and deservedly accused of almost everything would conduct herself in the face of such gentleness. Nina had a glib tongue and a quick wit, and knew when to deny and when to confess, — when to kneel and weep, and when to put on an air of offended virtue.

"She said not a word," said Atalanta. "She seemed astounded. So I said, 'Go, now, dear, and think of what I have been saying to you.' She went; and half an hour later I found her sewing, with tears dropping down her face. I comforted her a little;

and she kissed my hand and called me" — Atalanta laughed shyly — "what you call me sometimes!"

Alinori drew the young head down to his shoulder. "My little missionary!" he said. And he thought, "If she should know! If she should know!"

They were silent for a little while. The daylight was fading, and the rosy light of the fire beginning to show.

"I so pity people who do wrong knowingly," the young wife sighed. Then, starting up, "There is the advocate Randini! I will receive him while you go and dress."

CHAPTER XLII.

CUPID AS TITAN.

One morning of the following March the Countess Giorgini rose in a bad humor. The maid who attended her had a bad quarter of an hour.

"Why do you crimp and frizzle me so, Lucia? Leave my hair as nature made it. Take great pains to coil it carelessly. Now these front locks, hold them loosely — so! and see what they will do. Do you see? They creep round my forehead just as I want them. Fasten it so as not to disturb a hair. I don't want a comb. Put in those ball-topped hair-pins, the dark red tortoise-shell."

She tried three morning-dresses, tearing two of them off. The third had been often worn; but it was a favorite; and it was not yet too warm to wear the long robe of cream-colored cashmere with a sealskin border, and lining of richly-tinted Lord's red that looked as if you could squeeze a juice out of it.

It was soothing to put on such beautiful colors. "Leave a button to show the lining, and give me a red silk handkerchief. Yes, I will wear the brown girdle. Tassels are pretty when they fasten anything. Don't draw them close, let them hang loose on the left side."

She went out of her chamber, which was underneath the Signor Ludwig's studio, and stood hesitating a moment where to go; then took her way to the chapel, and looked in. No one was there. Mass was long

since over, and the chaplain already deep in his beloved history, while his pupil labored over a French composition, and counted between the chopped-up sentences how many minutes it would be before he could go out to ride on his pony.

The countess shut the chapel door with something of a bang; then opened it again, knelt on the threshold, and kissed the floor. "Forgive me, Jesus!" she said, and shut the door softly this time.

A little ante-room lay between her and the apartment of her Uncle Giovanni. She crossed it quietly, and opened the door into their *salon*. It was useless to tap, for they were both deaf; and she knew that their servant was out.

The two, Giovanni Giorgini and his wife, sat opposite each other, both silently staring at a square of morning sunshine on the floor between them. The old man had grown to have a placid beauty of age, and his youthful silliness had become venerable simplicity. The hair lay thick and silver-white on his head. The woman was bent and bald, and wore a painfully ugly cap.

They were so deaf that she stood between them before they were aware of her presence.

"Good-morning, my father's brother!" she said, and, bending, kissed the old man's pale and delicate hand.

He looked pleased. "Good-morning, child!" he said, not knowing who she was nor what she had said.

She crouched down at the arm of his chair, and he laid his hand on her head.

"Take a chair, Madama!" said the Signora Maria, rising with a lame stateliness.

Beatrice made a negative motion, and asked for their health, and if they wanted anything.

Then she went.

At the head of the stair she met the German artist. "I come to tell you that the portrait is sent, Signora Contessa," he said. "I have just returned from taking it to the station. On thinking of the steamers last night, I found that it may go by that of Thursday. But it was necessary to catch the first train."

While speaking, he glanced her over appreciatively from head to foot in evident approval of her colors.

It angered her anew. He was always admiring her as a lay figure, she thought. Those eyes that she had long since found were not calm, but a steady flame of enthusiasm, did not leave her for a moment. If averted from her face, and he was modesty personified, they rested at least on some portion of her dress.

"Come and talk to me," she said rather peremptorily; and he followed her to her little *salon*.

"Sanzio is intolerable to me!" she exclaimed. "I have no interest here. If I go away for eight months, then I can come here and rest the other four; but to live eight months here, with nothing that I really care for, is too much. I must go away. I will go to Sweden and Norway this time."

The artist looked at the carpet, and said nothing.

"I am out of humor to-day," she went on, half laughing. "Cannot you give me some distraction? Tell me your history. It would amuse me."

"My history is not illustrious, Madama," said the German seriously. "My father was a private soldier, and my mother a seamstress."

"Like her!" commented the countess, pointing to a Madonna on the wall.

"Yes; in one sense," he replied.

"Well?" she said impatiently, when he stopped.

"I learned something at school; and then I learned to play the violin. I played in the orchestra of a theatre. I became first violin."

"You play the violin; and have played in a theatre!" Beatrice exclaimed. "Why did you leave? What gave you the idea of being a painter?"

The Signor Ludwig's eyes sank, and he drew a shapely white hand down over his fair beard till only the point of it remained held between his finger and thumb. "It was my romance," he said in a low voice. "I was disappointed in love."

The countess blushed, but he did not.

"Well?" she said again.

"She was an actress in the theatre," he went on, still holding the beard in his finger and thumb, giving, some way, the impression that his mind was in suspense. "I watched her every night. I hated the hero of the play, and I adored her. It seemed to me that all the beautiful things she said came from her own heart. If she had bade me open my veins, and bleed to death at her feet, I would have done so."

"You were very foolish," the countess said sharply. "No one, man or woman, is worthy of such love."

"Madama," said the artist, looking at her almost reprovingly, "one loves according to one's own nature, not the nature of the person beloved."

His reply struck her silent.

"It is true that she was not worthy," he went on. "Still, she was not bad. She never encouraged me. She laughed at me; and she married a rich old man. It is long since I became indifferent to her, contessa. It was a boyish passion, foolish, perhaps, but beautiful. When I knew that she was to marry, I broke my violin, and went away. I learned to paint in order to paint her portrait; but when I had learned, I no longer

cared to paint her. She was an inferior woman, but still well enough."

"You have not played a violin since?" Beatrice asked.

"No, Madama. At first I could not, and then I had lost the habit, and was too much interested in my art. I have not taken a violin in my hands for seventeen years. I was then twenty. I am now thirty-seven."

"I am four years older," Beatrice thought. "Yet he looks as old as I." She asked, "Would it hurt you now to play?"

He smiled. "Not at all."

"Thanks, Signor Ludwig!" the countess said with sudden animation. "You have amused me; and I have made you lose time. May I come up this afternoon and see the medallions you have finished? I will come about sunset, if you permit. That gives you such a light!"

An idea had entered her mind while she listened, and she was eager to put it into execution.

There was a certain old musician in Sanzio who had a large collection of valuable music, some manuscripts of the old masters; and he had a rare violin to sell. She had heard it mentioned, and had forgotten it. Now she was on fire to possess it.

Always prompt and impetuous when no concealment was necessary, she called Betta, and started for the Sor Luigi's house. He lived on the street next below her own; and the lane at the end of the palace enabled her to go quietly. A little gate from her garden led to this lane.

In five minutes she was there, the Sor Luigi delighted to be honored with such a visit.

"I wish to look at the violin you have for sale,"

she said. "Perhaps I may buy it of you. But first I would like to take it home, and show it to a friend. If he approves, then I will keep it. I am not a judge of violins."

The musician took a very ordinary-looking case down from a shelf, opened it as though it might contain a butterfly which must not be allowed to escape, and took out the violin as though it were the butterfly.

"There! Signora Contessa!" he said, with an air of triumph.

Beatrice saw only a little red violin, but was careful not to say so. She asked the price.

"Three hundred *scudi!*"

"It is a good deal of money for a violin," she remarked somewhat dryly.

"But, Signora Contessa" — and he poured forth a volume of erudition on the subject of violins in general, and this one in particular.

"Is it nice for a violin to be red?" she asked doubtingly.

"That glazing is precious, Signora Contessa. The secret of it is lost. It is a mark, like the *patina* on an ancient copper coin."

She took the violin with her, Betta carrying it under her shawl, and returned home; and for the remainder of the day was in high good humor. She had something to think of.

She waited till the sun was setting; and when there was only a spot of his disk above the western mountains, she took the violin case in her hand, and went upstairs.

In visiting the artist's studio, she had always been accompanied by some one. Now, for the first time, she went alone.

She had studied her dress, a purple surah, with

slight shadings of black in the hollows of the folds. It fell soft and full to her feet, and trained a soft rustling mass behind her, with nothing to break the lines of its purple blooming folds. A little pointed cape of old Honiton lace hung open on the breast, and touched the waist behind. There was a large amethyst set in silver on each arm, and Honiton ruffles in the open sleeves. Long ear-rings of silver filigree, shaped like fuchsias, hung in her ears.

She tapped at the door of the studio, and it opened, letting her into a flood of light. There were three large windows now, and they gave a half of the sky, purple and rose to north and south, a stainless blaze of gold in the west.

"You are the south!" the artist said. He had glanced into the corridor and seen that no one followed her. As he closed the door, a delicate red showed in his cheeks. He looked at his visitor, and smiled. For the first time she saw something of excitement in his face. "You are twilight, with a rosy cloud left. All that you need is a star. May I paint that dress?"

"Do you see what I have brought?" she asked.

He took the case from her, set it on a table, and opened it. As he did so, his face expressed delight. He took the violin out with a dainty care. "*La crême de la Cremona!*" he murmured, and held it up against the light. "Do you see that it seems to be veneered with rubies?"

It was an exquisite moment for both. The studio was flooded with rich light; and where they stood they saw only the sky. The distance which had always heretofore divided them was tacitly forgotten. The superficial difference which rank and wealth had imposed had been to their mutual regard what the

burr is to the chestnut, and the fermenting period to the wine. They stood now on higher ground, a man and woman, each knowing what the other was in character. When the countess came alone to his studio, the painter knew that he had her confidence, as she had been sure of all his from the moment that he told her his youthful romance.

"Is it in tune?" he asked, laying the violin to his shoulder, and taking the bow.

"Yes; he told me that he had tuned it this morning. I would not let him touch a string. I wanted to hear the first note here, and from you."

"I will make you a true-lover's knot," he said, and, with his smiling eyes dwelling upon her face, he slowly lowered the bow.

The sound came pure and fine and far, as though the evening star should steal out audibly into the golden sky, trembling with that tremor which is strength. And slowly and trembling it swelled and died, and swelled and died again, so that it scarcely needed imagination to feel the double curve that wound itself together, with a little running thread flashing across, and up as high as a violin can reach.

"The topmost notes of a violin are spiritual, and link on to what we cannot hear above," the artist said.

"That was the true-lover's knot you made for your actress!" said Beatrice.

He laid the violin down, clouding over a little. "I did make it for her," he said humbly. "I was at an age when every fire-fly seems a star. I have confessed to you, my lady!"

"Dear honest soul!" she thought. "And I have not confessed to you!"

"Show me your pictures now before the light fades," she said. "We can have music by twilight."

He uncovered two oval pictures that had been placed in the strongest light. They were of a series painted for a ball-room, and represented Cupid as Titan. It was an airy, playful series, and exquisitely done. In one of these a charming Cupid bent under the weight of a soap-bubble, as Atlas. The laughing eyes looked out from under golden locks of dropping hair that almost concealed them, and the large opal-tinted bubble was distinct against a purple curtain.

The bubble contained a sigh.

The second was Cupid as Sisyphus. He had rolled a heart to the top of a high mountain that diminished to a point of *lapis-lazuli;* and he stood there with a little woe-begone face, and watched it rolling down again, wounded by sharp rocks and thorns. A little black cloud, shaped like a pair of eyebrows, stretches across the mountain peak.

This was a frown.

"Do you know," said Beatrice, "when I first saw you, I thought that you would paint architectural pictures, everything correctly copied, and a great deal of conscience in the bricks."

She laughed a little, joyously, and looked at him with pride.

She stood beside a window with its full light in her face. Not a sign of age was in the bright brown hair or on the smooth skin or in the sparkling eyes. A young girl beside her would have looked crude. She drew herself up and challenged him with her beauty; and he stood back a little and looked at her in a moment of such silence as could only precede an explosion.

"Oh! my lady, speak! speak!" he exclaimed, lifting his hands.

"If I bade you open your veins and bleed to death

at my feet, you would not do it for me, as you would have done for that girl," she said, still smiling.

"Has not my life been bleeding itself out at your feet, drop by drop, for two years?" he exclaimed.

"See! there is a star," said Beatrice, "and the Ave Maria is ringing. I must go down. Sometimes you will play your violin to me, will you not? Good-evening!"

She went toward the door, but he stood with his back against it. "Am I ever to see you again?" he asked. His face had changed suddenly. "I am at your feet, signora; but still I am too good to mock at. I would have kept silence forever, if you had not bade me speak."

"Will you please to let me pass, Signor Ludwig?" she asked with gentle courtesy.

"My God!" he muttered, and stood back, holding the door open for her.

She went out into the corridor, and turned there just as he was making a motion to go toward the window, not even looking after her.

"Carl!" she said. "You will come and go about the palace, and order what you want, and have yourself served, just as if you were already master here. And when you are ready to be master indeed, the palace and all that it contains is yours."

"Oh! my lady!" he murmured, hastening to her.

"And come down this evening for a little while, please. Some people are coming in. And, Carl, if you should let them see that we are all in all to each other, I will not contradict you."

He was kneeling at her feet.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE HOUSE-ANGEL.

THE Contessa 'Lata, as she was called by all Sanzio and Ombra, wrote two months later to her parents an account of the Giorgini-Ludwig wedding.

"It was the event of this generation in the two towns; and everything was well done. They were married in the cathedral, which is, you will recollect, at the end of their street and the corner of the *piazza*.

"Francesco and I went over the day before, stopping with Beatrice, of course. The civil marriage took place the evening before the religious ceremony. No one went but the advocate Randini, Marchese Tulli, Francesco and me, excepting always Cesare, whom Beatrice is almost spoiling. The three gentlemen were the witnesses. We drove to the city hall in two barouches, and were back in twenty minutes. Of course everybody was on the lookout, the *piazza* crowded. Bice wore a beautiful dress made in Milan. And, by the way, all her things were ordered from Milan. She says they are quite as tasteful as in Paris, and more picturesque. It was something of fawn-colored silk and brown velvet, with two or three very much fulled-up bows of deep red surah. The little mantilla was of brown velvet lined with red, and the bonnet of fawn-colored lace, with a large red rose and a brown velvet bow at the top.

"On our return, our little party had a quiet dinner.

"The next morning was splendid; and by seven o'clock there was a crowd gathering in the *piazza* of the cathedral, and all along the street. But everything had been perfectly ordered, and the way was kept clear. About fifty of the most distinguished persons of the town came to the palace fifteen or twenty minutes before we started, to join the bridal procession. Francesco and I received them. The gentlemen were in morning dress, the ladies in elegant costumes, with veils on their heads. Five minutes before the time a carpet was stretched out from the *portone* all the way to the cathedral door; and then Bice came down. We were on the watch, with the drawing-room doors and *portiera* wide open, and in order to follow her down the wide stairs, all laid like the street with a red carpet. Bice walked with her bridegroom, and Cesare followed her as page. They had no other attendant. You never saw a little fellow so proud. He stood behind her during the ceremony, and sat at her feet in the sanctuary; for, of course, the bride and bridegroom had seats inside the rail. The child behaved with great dignity; only when he took her glove off, at some hitch which we couldn't see, he looked up into her face with a gay little laugh, instantly checked.

"The countess wore a pale olive satin with a train, and a bonnet and scarf of olive-colored lace; and where she got olive-blossoms from a month before they bloom here, I do not know. But there were the dear little creamy-green-gray-yellow things in a cluster over her head, and with them three of the colored sugar-maple leaves you sent out last autumn, — the very leaves! The dress was plain, but had such a border and side-stripe! Signor Ludwig painted on olive velvet a wreath of leaves in imitation of those

maple leaves, all in rich soft tints of red and gold and green, and rose, melting into each other.

"Our carpet had a living wall at either side; and the windows and balconies were full. As the procession went rustling along, shining and perfumed, through the May sunshine, it must have been a very pretty sight.

"I wore a brocaded black grenadine dress and mantle made over blue silk, and Francesco thought that I looked very well.

"Bice and her husband have gone out to their villa for an indefinite time. They will watch the farming, and sit under the trees, and see the summer coming. She has commemorated her marriage with a *dot* to some poor girl every year, the establishment of a chapel in the laurel grove at our villa in Ombra, and a pension for some poor lady, to be selected by the *sindaco* of Sanzio.

"Besides this, there was a largess on the day of the wedding, a dinner to the cathedral choir and the town band, and a grand breakfast to the bridal procession party.

"A table in the ante-room was piled with poems and sonnets addressed to the bride and bridegroom. They were printed on tinted or embossed paper, some of them very elegantly. The authors and authoresses sent each fifty copies of their production, and these were distributed among the friends present. Even Cesare wrote one, a very dignified composition, in which I saw clearly the brooding shadow of the *canonico;* and the *canonico* sent an exquisite one in *propria personæ.*

"Of course, there were whispers about Beatrice's marrying a poor artist, and some who hoped to be fortunate were rather bitter. But no one denies that he

is good-looking, and an excellent man. It is rather hard to get at his character, which has a thick crust of quiet reserve and diffidence; but the more we see of him the better we like him. Beatrice insists that he is a very superior man, and she exacts a great deal of respect for him.

"What a long letter I have written, and what a quantity of millinery there is in it! I know the girls will like to be told about the dresses. Only two words more. I do hope that my belated portrait will have escaped the custom-house purgatory by this time, and has been welcomed by the dear home circle.

"Tell Kitty that every time I think of her engagement to Silvio, I rejoice."

The portrait, sent two months before the letter was written, had, in fact, arrived only with the letter. It had been nearly impossible for the Italian custom-house officials to convince themselves that it was a modern portrait, and they had detained it under the impression that some convent or church had been robbed of a precious altar piece. A valuable picture having been illegally sold and filched out of the country not long before made the supposition reasonable. It also made their leisurely search through the peninsula still more leisurely.

But, having at length become convinced of the truth, they immediately despatched the case with the most courteous of explanations. Arrived in America, it suffered another expiatory season, that of silence. Finally, it was handed down from the baggage-car of the same train which brought the letter, and the case stood unopened in the large drawing-room while the letter was being read, and till the whole household should be gathered. Silvio was sent for; James and

young Edith Selwyn, who were visiting Beechlands, were being searched for in some romantic grove; and Robert, who was studying for college with the minister at Four Corners, must be present at the solemn opening. It was time for him to appear; and Mary, the younger, was down in the road watching for the first glimpse of him turning the corner by Perry's.

"That I should have a daughter painted on a gold ground!" said the doctor with pride, folding the letter.

"Your wife is getting herself on to a silver ground," said Mary; and she produced a pocketbook, and took a folded paper from it, and out of the paper she drew something fine and almost invisible that had a silvery sparkle in the sunlight. It was a long, long white hair. "I found it this morning," she said. "It is the first one."

The doctor took it from her, glanced at her still beautiful auburn locks, then stood gazing thoughtfully, even solemnly, at the silver thread in his hand. What he was thinking, he did not say; but, after a moment, he went to open the family Bible, and, finding the record of his marriage, let the hair sink down on to it, coil over coil, carefully shutting the book again.

"The portrait will be a consolation," Mary said; "but I hope that it will be the last consolation of the kind that we shall need. Thank Heaven, Kitty is going to marry some one who will not take her away from us. Kitty," to the girl who entered, "do you know that I taught Silvio his letters?"

"And geography," the doctor struck in. "The first time I ever saw your mother, Kitty, she was describing the mouth of the Am" —

"James!" exclaimed his wife.

"I think that Robert is coming, mother," Kitty said, full of excitement. "And here is Silvio."

Mary went out to the door to see her boy galloping up the avenue; then, her gaze went off to the western sky, and she stood there in a way she had, with something wistful and searching in her eyes, as if expecting one who was long in coming. And, as she gazed, she held a fold of her dress between her fingers.

Little Mary appeared with a "Come, mother! we are all here," and led her back to the drawing-room.

Mary seated herself opposite the picture, with the young people about her; and the doctor began to take the screws out, Silvio assisting.

There was a breathless silence in the room, then a simultaneous "Oh!" long drawn out. The custom-house officers who had thought that they might be sending a Fra Angelico out of Italy were justified triumphantly.

The figure stood on a ground of pure gold diapered in a small pattern. The splendid hair hung down, so expanding above the shoulders in a light soft mass, and so narrowing downward and out of sight in a burnished edge, as to suggest wings. A long robe of dull pale green, with a few irregular lines and spots of gold on it, fell to her feet, outlining a slender figure. There was a narrow border at the neck and around the wide sleeves. Her hands were lightly laid palm to palm before her breast, in a prayerful or adoring attitude; but the soft eyes gazed straight out, with a look of happy, innocent wonder, as if they had caught a peaceful glimpse of heaven, and found the scene familiar.

It was Atalanta and an angel, both in one. They already knew what name Count Alinori had given to

the picture, a name that the artist had written below: "The House-Angel."

They gazed in a silence that no one liked to break, till the doctor took his handkerchief out to wipe away the tears that were running down his cheeks.

"Oh, mother!" he said to Mary, "isn't it beautiful!"

Novels and Stories.

Books by Thomas Bailey Aldrich.

The Story of a Bad Boy. Illustrated. 12mo, $1.25.

Marjorie Daw and Other People. Short Stories. With frontispiece. 12mo, $1.50.

Marjorie Daw and Other Stories. In Riverside Aldine Series. 16mo, $1.00. These volumes are not identical in contents.

Prudence Palfrey. A Novel. With frontispiece. 12mo, $1.50.

The Queen of Sheba. A Novel. 12mo, $1.50; paper covers, 50 cents.

The Stillwater Tragedy. A Novel. 12mo, $1.50.

The Story of a Cat. Translated from the French of EMILE DE LA BEDOLLIERRE by T. B. ALDRICH. Illustrated with silhouettes by HOPKINS. 12mo, ornamental boards, $1.00.

By William Henry Bishop.

Detmold: A Romance. 18mo, $1.25.

The House of a Merchant Prince. A Novel. 12mo, $1.50.

Choy Susan, and other Stories. 16mo, $1.25.

The Golden Justice. A Novel. 16mo, $1.25.

Books by Edgar Fawcett.

A Hopeless Case. 18mo, $1.25.

A Gentleman of Leisure. 18mo, $1.00.

An Ambitious Woman. 12mo, $1.50; paper covers, 50 cents.

The Confessions of Claud. $1.50.

The House at High Bridge. 12mo, $1.50; Paper covers, 50 cents.

Social Silhouettes. 12mo, $1.50.

The Adventures of a Widow. 12mo, $1.50; Paper covers, 50 cents.

Tinkling Cymbals. 12mo, $1.50.

By Henry James.

A Passionate Pilgrim, and Other Tales. 12mo, $2.00.

Transatlantic Sketches. 12mo, $2.00.

Roderick Hudson. 12mo, $2.00.

The American. 12mo, $2.00.

The Europeans. 12mo, $1.50.

Confidence. 12mo, $1.50.

The Portrait of a Lady. 12mo, $2.00.

The Author of Beltraffio; Pandora; Georgina's Reasons; The Path of Duty; Four Meetings. 12mo, $1.50.

The Siege of London; The Pension Beaurepas; and The Point of View 12mo, $1.50.

Tales of Three Cities. 12mo, $1.50; Paper covers, 50 cents.

A Little Tour in France. 12mo, $1.50.

Portraits of Places. 12mo, $1.50.

Daisy Miller: A Comedy. 12mo, $1.50.

Watch and Ward. A Novel. 18mo, $1.25.

The above thirteen 12mo volumes, $22.00.

*** For sale by all Booksellers. Sent, post-paid, on receipt of price by the Publishers,*

Houghton, Mifflin and Company,

4 PARK ST., BOSTON; 11 EAST SEVENTEENTH ST., NEW YORK.

Novels and Stories.

Books by Elizabeth Stuart Phelps.

The Gates Ajar. 16mo, $1.50.
Beyond the Gates. 16mo, $1.25.
The Gates Between. 16mo, $1.25.
Men, Women, and Ghosts. Short stories. 16mo, $1.50.
Hedged In. 16mo, $1.50.
The Silent Partner. 16mo, $1.50.
The Story of Avis. 16mo, $1.50; paper covers, 50 cents.
Sealed Orders, and other Stories. 16mo, $1.50.
Friends: A Duet. A Novel. 16mo, $1.25.
An Old Maid's Paradise, and Burglars in Paradise. 16mo, $1.25.
Doctor Zay. 16mo, $1.25.

The above eleven volumes, uniform, $15.00.

The Madonna of the Tubs. Illustrated. 12mo, full gilt, $1.50.
Jack the Fisherman. Illustrated. Square 12mo, boards, 50 cents.
The Trotty Book. For Young Folks. Illustrated. Small 4to, $1.25.
Trotty's Wedding Tour and Story Book. With Portrait of Trotty and Illustrations. Small 4to, $1.25

By Nora Perry.

The Youngest Miss Lorton, and other Stories. Illustrated. 12mo, $1.50.
A Flock of Girls. Illustrated. 12mo, $1.50.
For a Woman. 18mo, $1.00.
A Book of Love Stories. 16mo, $1.00.
The Tragedy of the Unexpected. 18mo, $1.25.

Books by Mrs. A. D. T. Whitney.

Faith Gartney's Girlhood. 12mo, $1.50.
Hitherto: A Story of Yesterdays. 12mo, $1.50.
Patience Strong's Outings. 12mo, $1.50.
The Gayworthys. 12mo, $1.50.
A Summer in Leslie Goldthwaite's Life. Illustrated. 12mo, $1.30.
We Girls: A Home Story. Illustrated. 12mo, $1.50.
Real Folks. Illustrated. 12mo, $1.50.
The Other Girls. Illustrated. 12mo, $1.50.
Sights and Insights. 2 volumes. 12mo, $3.00.
Odd, or Even? 12mo, $1.50.
Bonnyborough. 12mo, $1.50.
Boys at Chequasset. Illustrated. 12mo, $1.50.
Mother Goose for Grown Folks. Enlarged Edition. Illustrated. 12mo, $1.50.
Homespun Yarns. Short Stories. 12mo, $1.50.

The above 15 volumes in box, $22.50.

*** *For sale by all Booksellers. Sent by mail, post-paid, on receipt of price by the Publishers,*

Houghton, Mifflin and Company,

4 PARK ST., BOSTON; 11 EAST SEVENTEENTH ST., NEW YORK.

Novels and Stories.

By Sarah Orne Jewett.

The King of Folly Island, and Other People. 16mo, $1.25.
A White Heron, and Other Stories. 18mo, gilt top, $1.25.
A Marsh Island. 16mo, $1.25.
A Country Doctor. 16mo, $1.25.
Deephaven. 18mo, gilt top, $1.25.
Old Friends and New. 18mo, gilt top, $1.25.
Country By-Ways. 18mo, gilt top, $1.25.
The Mate of the Daylight, and Friends Ashore. 18mo, gilt top, $1.25
Play Days. Stories for Children. Square 16mo, $1.50.

Books by Robert Grant.

An Average Man. 12mo, $1.50.
The Confessions of a Frivolous Girl. 12mo, $1.25; Paper covers, 50 cents.
The Knave of Hearts. 12mo, $1.25.
A Romantic Young Lady. 12mo $1.50.

By Ellen Olney Kirk.

A Midsummer Madness. A Novel. 16mo, $1.25.
A Lesson in Love. 16mo, $1.00; Paper covers, 50 cents.
The Story of Margaret Kent. 12mo, $1.50; Paper covers, 50 cents.
Sons and Daughters. 12mo, $1.50; Paper covers, 50 cents.
Queen Money. 12mo, $1.50; Paper covers, 50 cents.
Better Times. 12mo, $1.50.
A Daughter of Eve. 12mo, $1.50,

By F. Marion Crawford.

To Leeward. 16mo, $1.25.
A Roman Singer. 16mo, $1.25.
An American Politician. 16mo, $1.25.
Paul Patoff. Crown 8vo, $1.50.

By E. W. Howe.

A Man Story. 12mo, $1.50.
The Story of a Country Town. 12mo, $1.50; Paper covers, 50 cents.
A Moonlight Boy. With Portrait, 12mo, $1.50; Paper covers, 50 cents.
The Mystery of the Locks. 12mo, $1.50.

*** *For sale by all Booksellers. Sent by mail, post-paid, on receipt of price by the Publishers,*

Houghton, Mifflin and Company,

4 PARK ST., BOSTON; 11 EAST SEVENTEENTH ST., NEW YORK.

Novels and Stories.

By Rose Terry Cooke.

Happy Dodd; or, "She Hath Done what She Could." 12mo, $1.50.
Somebody's Neighbors. Short Stories. 12mo, $1.50; half calf, $3.00.
The Sphinx's Children, and other People's. Short Stories. 12mo, $1.50.
Steadfast. The Story of a Saint and a Sinner. 12mo, $1.50.

Arlo Bates.

The Philistines. A Novel. 12mo, $1.50.
The Pagans. 16mo, $1.00; paper covers, 50 cents.
Patty's Perversities. A Novel. 16mo, $1.00; paper covers, 50 cents.

Jane G. Austin.

A Nameless Nobleman. A Novel. 16mo, $1.00; paper covers, 50 cents.
The Desmond Hundred. A Novel. 16mo, $1.00; paper covers, 50 cents.
Nantucket Scraps. 16mo, $1.50.

By Miriam Coles Harris.

Rutledge, The Sutherlands, St. Philips, A Perfect Adonis, Happy Go-Lucky, Frank Warrington, Richard Vandermarck, Missy, Phœbe.

Each volume, uniform, 16mo, $1.25.
Louie's Last Term at St. Mary's. 16mo, $1.00.
The set, 10 volumes in box, $12.00.

Augustus Hoppin.

Recollections of Auton House. Illustrated by the author. 8vo, $1.25.
A Fashionable Sufferer. Illustrated by the author. 12mo, $1.50.
Two Compton Boys. Illustrated by the author. Square 8vo, $1.50.

Maria S. Cummins.

The Lamplighter. *New Popular Edition.* 12mo, $1.00; paper covers, 25 cents.
El Fureidîs. 12mo, $1.50.
Mabel Vaughan. New Edition. 12mo, $1.50.

*** *For sale by all Booksellers. Sent by mail, post-paid, on receipt of price by the Publishers,*

Houghton, Mifflin and Company,

4 Park St., Boston; 11 East Seventeenth St., New York.

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
3 9999 10019 371 1